Wordeater #74
JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

WORLD SPEED-READING RECORD HOLDER FLOYD PATTERSON INADVERTENTLY BREAKS THE SOUND BARRIER.

Wordeater 74 Staff

Holly Bruns, Jeff DeGrave, Maria Mellinger, Andrew Pritchard, Virginia Strouse, John Stobart

In order to get a selection published in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

Manuscripts or cover designs for

wordeater 75

must be submitted to John Stobart in room C-1069 by:

February 22, 1991

Manuscripts will not be returned and should by typed.

AWARDS

POETRY

$ 15 to Maria Mellinger
$ 5 to Holly Bruns
$ 5 to Jeff DeGrave

PROSE

$ 15 to Holly Bruns
$ 5 to Lora Baker
$ 5 to Chad Elmore

COVERS

$ 20 to Dave Gardner

Next Deadlines:
February 22, 1991
April 26, 1991

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NOTE: Again, space has prevented the appearance of all items accepted for this issue. Look for work by Holly Bruns, Jeff DeGrave, Connie Legters, and Maria Mellinger in *WORDEATER 75*.

Maria Mellinger

YOU USED TO TELL ME

You used to tell me I was
Your eyes because you could see now,
Your lips because you could breathe now,
Your heart because you could feel now....
Now
I'm some collection of muscles
That enable you to walk away.

«««««»»»»»

Julie Haggerty

GATES

Like a galloping horse
I run through this life
Jumping gates that are closed

Sometimes I trip or fall
into the mud
but I clean myself off
and learn from my mistakes

I would watch others
but I can't learn from them
what I can not feel

Sometimes I soar the gates
and look back and smile
until I find myself
wrapped up in steel wire

One has to laugh at life
to get out alive
screaming won't help cut wire

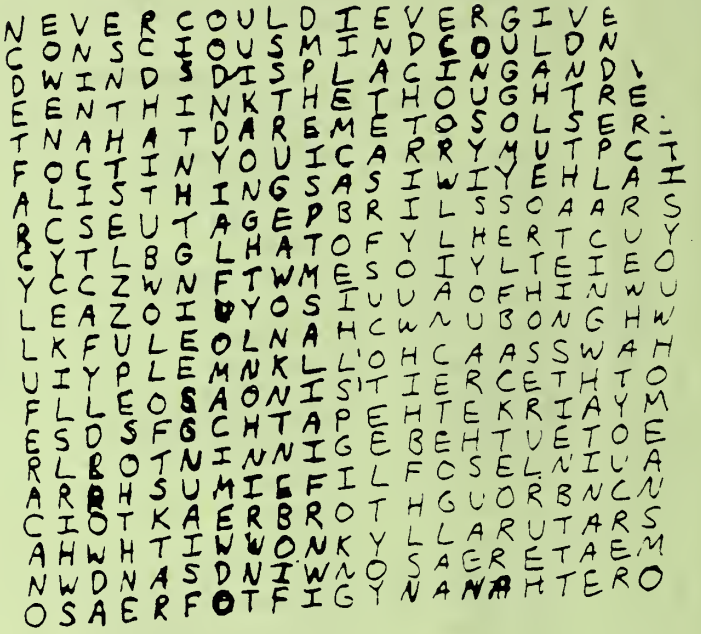
With a little luck
we'll make it past the gates
with a little pain
we may learn on the way

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

NEVER COULD I EVER

THE PUZZLE:



THE SOLUTION:

Never—
Could I every give you up.
It is you who means more
Than any gift of Reason.
A carefully crafted conscious mind
Could never carve what you create.

Reason winds and whirls like cyclone winds—
Displacing and replacing what I naturally know
With worldly facts.
I can think the thoughts that Einstein brought
Or break those puzzles that dare me to solve
Or those rules of life I must follow.

But in you I carry myself back—
The beginning
Seeing things as I wish
You are the path—camouflaged brilliance
It's in only that of you
Who'll know me such as I...
(P.S. You can figure out the rest.)

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

WHEN YOU LEAVE

When you leave I have
Tears like old wooden
Carnival horses
That no longer glide
Gracefully
Down their golden bars,
But clatter and bang
Past the brass ring.

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

ITITIS

Ititis Ititis
Its become my disease
Its assumed all control
Somebody cure me please
I hope its not catching
'Cos its afflicted me
Its become my cocaine
I'm addicted you see

But without its presence
I'd have nothing to write
Its kind of a craving
But its still my delight
I got a little niche
Burned right into my brain
Its feeble attraction
From which I can't abstain

Its not really that bad
Its never going to leave
Its taken my power
I've now learned to believe
Its become my little act
Its fantastic this way
Its really no big deal
I guess its all I have to say...

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

TO LOVE A DARK HORSE

As they push me down the hallway in this uncomfortable hospital bed I watch the fluorescent lights flicker by. Each one that passes brings me closer to the delivery room and I wonder if I'd had an abortion, would I have seen the lights like this? They look like too-bright lightening bugs, the kind that always escaped the mayonnaise jar fat of the weak. If I had gone to an abortion clinic, would they have wheeled me into the room or would I have walked into that most sterile of environments head down, watching my feet at work on the floor?

They have these same fluorescent lights in schools. I remember staring up into them, I think in the fourth grade, waiting for my eyes to burn. I liked looking away and seeing black spots or inverted photographs of what I had been watching. Sometimes I could complain to the nurse of headaches and get sent home. They even had me checked for eyeglasses, I complained so much, but if I had just looked away I would have been fine.

Throughout junior high I looked at the ceiling to avoid the eyes all around me. Lights will illuminate you no matter what your circumstances; the same glow was felt by cheerleaders, freaks, and library dwellers who tried to seep into the darkened bindings of books.

Later, in high school, I left the lights behind. So much more happens in the dark. So many promises.

The first time I had sex, the entire house was dark. The boy's parents weren't home, so we became adults on the living room sofa with the television as our only witness. It was a black and white television, I remember that, because it distracted me from his smell and the noises he made. It gave off such a faint glow that I couldn't tell the color of the carpeting immediately in front of it.

He drove me home and I watched the headlights of each oncoming car like a frightened deer, wondering which were high beams and which were low and if it really mattered since the car would eventually hit me either way. He kissed me at every stop sign we came to, but I didn't really care. He told me he loved when my porchlight came in view from around the corner.

That night I burned candles, which give off such a different light, but painful all the same. I traced the shadows thrown on my walls and made fingerprints in the little wax puddles, remembering a story our English teacher read once, about a moth that flies into a candle and becomes the candle's wick. I wanted to fly into candles or become the filament in an ordinary bulb and escape my darkness.

Instead I slept with that boy in the darkness until I believed it was something special. I loved him.

****

We spent years in the shadows of school dances,

(continued)

the fog of meeting each other's family, the murkiness of one another. Once, he accidentally said he would marry me. I became excited, thinking that our gloom could be cured by a wedding—all that white reflecting into the corners of our selves. He even bought me a cloudy little diamond (my hands have been so swollen these past months that I don't wear it).

Maybe he recognized the absence of light too. Sometimes we wouldn't talk for days, not fighting, not noticing each other outwardly. I would curl into the fetal position under all my bedcovers. I imagined him sitting on the sofa in his parents' house; if he was really there, I don't know. Eventually our sweaty starved bodies would find each other again, and the tension would evaporate with the moistness on the middle of his back.

Other times it was almost like being happy. He could become that flame I wanted to burn in or the glow I kept squinting to see. We could love each other when we tried.

He told me that if I ever got pregnant, he would marry me. We were going to be married anyway; what would a few months earlier hurt? He would tell me that and I would hide my head where his neck and shoulder met, away from the shimmer of his lie, into the truth of his body.

****

The hospital hallway spits me out and I'm in that room now, where they'll pull this burden out of my body and into the day. They're putting my feet into stirrups and the only place for me to look is the ceiling light. They're so bright they must cut clear through my belly and into the baby. No wonder it won't come out—it's safe in the darkness inside me. When the pain comes I clench my eyes like fists and see those fourth grade spots again. The difference is *these* nurses won't send me home. They've seen my kind before.

That's what the lady at the abortion clinic said. "We've seen your kind before." She said she wished she'd had a penny for each girl that came in crying, "He said he loved me." I wanted to ask, "Isn't the payment enough? Do you need our pennies of humiliation?"

That woman wouldn't have pushed me down a lighted hallway. She wouldn't have wiped my forehead the way this nurse is doing now. "What's wrong with me?" I ask her, and she says, "Nothing. It's like this for everyone."

I almost laugh. *Everyone*? He's at home right now, sitting on that same sofa, watching that dim little television. I always thought I'd be better alone, but he turned off the lights that first night with such determination. I've been afraid all this time to look back into them. I've ignored the fluorescents all around me. I only stare at them now because they're so high above this bed, removed from all the pain.

When I told him I was pregnant, he said, "We can't get married now. It's not the right time."

I said, "We were going to get married anyway..."

He didn't answer me. "There are other things you can do."

"You mean get rid of it?"

Silence. Dark and terrible silence.

"I can't *do* that," I said. "It's ours. It's *yours*—"

"It's not the right time."

A few days later he gave me half the abortion money and said to call him when it was all over. I haven't called all these months. He said he loved me, but my phone's not ringing.

****

I have this dream that when all this is over with he'll visit me in the hospital. He'll see our baby and say he was wrong—thank God I didn't go through with the abortion. We'll get married and live with 60-watt bulbs in every room of our house and a 20-inch color television to better view the carpeting with.

There's also a nightmare I have where we accidentally meet outside the grocery store or something like that. He sees the child in my arms but it doesn't change anything. My bag full of bulbs and flashlight batteries fall suicidally toward the pavement. "I would have married you," he says, "but it just wasn't the right time."

I remember another story our English teacher read once, called "A Place of Light." I forgot everything except that title. What I wouldn't do for a little place of light all my own. The dark has gotten so depressing.

Another pain comes and I don't know what's happening to me. The doctor says, "This might be the last one now." All I know is these lights in here are so damn bright and this hurts so much, but I'm going to keep my eyes open. I want to see the light.

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The doctor says, "One more push..."

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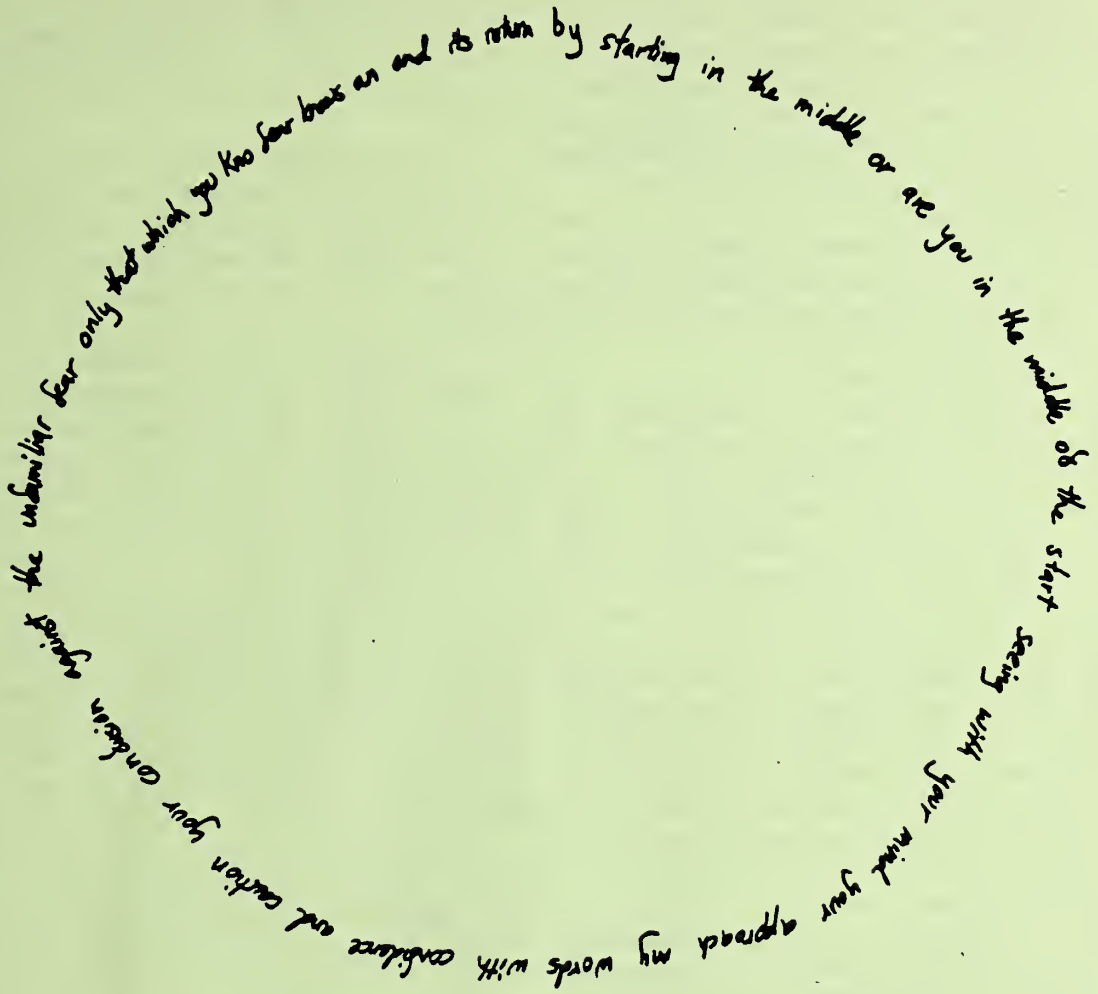
Jeff DeGrave

FEAR



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Maria Mellinger

THIS IS LARRY'S STORY—HE WANTS IT TOLD

I had this dream last night that Larry wasn't dead. I was at the cemetery looking at his grave when I realized there's no body down there. There's a plot of dirt or maybe an empty coffin, but nothing else. The tombstone is there so we may find the grave. But Larry is *not* there.

I went to the nursing home I used to work at and searched through the directory of names. Under A rooms—people who could still get about on their own—nothing. Under B rooms—the second floor, for people who needed watching—nothing. Under H—the hospital section of the second floor—his name, room 3H.

Hospital? I thought. Has he been in a coma all this time?

I ask the nun behind the registration desk if Larry's really up there. Knowingly, she smiles and says, "Yes, he is."

"Can I see him?"

(continued)

"Yes, you may." And she leads me up the stairs I used to walk with trays in hand, pureed food in little pockets of the dish, vitamin drinks of curdled milk thickness bumping against the sides of the styrofoam cups. Please don't feed Larry that kind of food, I thought. He's not like the old people here, waiting for death the way they wait for dinner, wondering which will come sooner today.

When we look in the doorway of his room we see him asleep in bed, blanket pulled so that I can't see his face, light rushing in each of the three windows, particles and beams bounding into one another in their hurry, shooting dust in all directions.

"The coma...?" I whisper.

"No," the nun answers. "He's just resting. No one visits him here. He sleeps most of the time."

To give him time to wake up, I guess then I go downstairs and visit the people I used to work with. I do steal into the kitchen, however, to glance at Larry's diet card. It has a little gray dot in the corner and I feel much more comfortable. That dot means he's eating regular food, not the meals of the aged and infirm.

When I'm outside his room again he's sitting up in a chair. He's covered by that same blanket, with a naked leg and the chest of a ten-year-old boy visible. He has fluffy brown bangs teasing his eyelashes and the puffy cheeks of a child actor. He was 19 years old the night he slipped into a coma, but today he is not even a teenager.

"Do you remember me?" I ask, and think of explaining. I only met you once, I'd say, not counting the funeral. We passed a few times in the hallways or on sidewalks, but I don't like people much and pay little attention to the living. I've become much closer to you since then. I know so much more about you now. I probably love you.

But I don't explain and he doesn't answer. He leans his head on his chubby left hand—it's probably swollen from the coma—like a little boy in a cereal commercial.

A few minutes later he's dressed in pajamas. We used to be the same age, but now here he is pushing a toy truck across the carpeted floor. I can't tell if he has escaped all the years that caused him trouble or if the coma has made him a child again. Has he been to high school yet? Will he have to die again? Or is this what time does to you when you don't move—it rewinds and stops when something, a childhood memory of happiness maybe, catches? Is the 19-year-old Larry still inside this child?

We start playing and I try to talk to him like an adult in terms of his childish ear understands. I want to hold him, but if he's a child I'm not his mother, and if he's the 19-year-old I met once, I'm not his girlfriend. I'm not sure what I am or why I'm here.

But he's alive. Larry is alive and all I can think is why isn't anyone visiting him? Why isn't anyone with him? They must have forgotten the grave is empty.

It's time for me to leave, so I tell him I'll visit tomorrow. I can't remember if he's happy because he moves back into that chair and leans on his hand again. The nun, however, pats me on the back like a good girl and says, "He has no other visitors. You must come back."

From my car, I can see him in one of the windows, 19 years old again, waving goodbye.

I wake up. For an instant, I believe the dream-Larry is alive somewhere—but I blink and the weighty truth hits me, almost pushing me back into the pillows. I feel like the blood inside my heart has solidified and dropped deep into my chest. Larry is dead.

I would cry, but I try not to. My fiancee is alive and I love him very much. My brother is alive. There have been no deaths in my family that we couldn't pick ourselves up after, put the puzzle back together and match the picture on the box. That chunk of solid blood in my body whispers to me that I love Larry too. And Larry is dead with no solution to the puzzle and no photographs left behind.

Yet whenever I write about him we become closer. I'd like to tell him, I'm beginning to feel like I know you better than anyone, that you speak through me, that I only say what you want heard. Of course, I'm wrong. People loved you in life. They have the advantage.

Later that day I visited Larry's grave. A young tree grows at his feet, beloved son and brother is written at his head. There is nothing written defining a relationship between the two of us. Perhaps the only relationship is in my mind. I feel connected, though, sitting to the side of his grave, explaining.

I know that he has visitors. I know how his girlfriend looks toward the cemetery when we drive past. I know how his sister expects to hear his footsteps on the stairs at their house. I know how his friends may read this and wonder who I am, why I dream of a friendship I never had.

I know Larry understands.

There's a fresh grave a few feet away. I break off a flower from the arrangement and put it on Larry's stone between his name and the carved cross. I hope someone will see it there, the single white rose, and

(continued)

Larry's Story, cont... d

wonder who put it there. Maybe they'll think it's a gift from him—a thank you for visiting, for remembering.

I stand up and look away. Goodbye, I tell him. I'll be back again.

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Judy Belfield

A JUNGLE END

For weeks he had been stalking, floating noiselessly in his single-passenger boat through the dense jungle foliage, gliding stealthily, slowly, on the still, green water. Day after day, he watched, quietly paddling his craft around one ess-curve after another, coursing steadily through the immense leafy tunnel that choked the sun from the river. At times, he stopped bankside, the boat halting abruptly with a muffled thud against a lush growth of tall grass. Then, he would listen intently to the incessant buzz of the jungle, the buzz of an infinite number of insects. He would listen, straining to hear the one sound he anticipated with such passion. Day after day, the buzz began in a whisper, then grew and grew as the afternoon heat thickened.

When he returned to camp each night, his eardrums threatened to explode; the buzz roared round him as he lay in his tent waiting for sleep, then continued its deafening cadence in his dreams.

If he didn't find one soon, he would go mad from the buzzing, he was sure. If not the buzzing, the humidity, the thick, sweetsalt humidity sucking out his breath hour after hour, day after day.

On the third day of the fourth week, he finally heard it—a soft splash just ahead. His body stiffened; sweat glistening sheen on his face and chest. He waited. The buzz was reaching crescendo. Had he imagined the splash? Was his mind playing tricks?

He waited, rigid, barely breathing. Then, almost inaudibly, another soft splash lapped. He turned his head slowly in its direction and saw a trail of water parting in a gentle swath. The swath quivered, then rippled quietly back together again, leaving a blurred line shivering silently over the path of his prey.

The hunter smiled, squelching his desire to scream for joy, a desire that raced through all the nerves in his skin, a desire that grabbed his stomach and squeezed it like a python wrapped around a piglet. He might have squealed, were he not experienced. Adrenalin bristled inside him.

If he were more relaxed, he would have thought, "Ah, after four weeks, success. Success!" But he wasn't relaxed. He seemed not to be thinking at all, merely reaching for his gun, slowly, quietly, raising it to his shoulder, pulling back the firing hammer ever so gradually till it caught with an almost noiseless click. His hand moved down the stock as tenderly as a gloved caress of Incan pottery in a museum. His index finger locked in place on the trigger as he sighted down the barrel, slowly following the quivering line rippling across the river several yards in front of him.

It wasn't just the money the horn would fetch, although the amount would be considerable. The money was a distant end, not nearly as rewarding as the hunt, not even faintly as exciting as this moment waiting for his chance to fire.

These were the rarest kind of rhino; it was thought they numbered less than two-hundred, but an accurate count couldn't be made because the animals were exceedingly secretive. After massive slaughter of their herds, they seemed to have gone into hiding. It took weeks, sometimes even months, just to sight one.

He had sighted one now, and it was a mere stone's throw away.

He watched as the quivering line of water approached the shore. The tip of a horn poked through the river. The hunter's finger tensed on the trigger. Easy...easy, he whispered silently. C'mon out nice and slow, baby, nice and slow.

First the head, then the shoulders raised up out of the water as the animal climbed the bank. Its front legs appeared, then the bulk of a magnificent torso. It was huge, but one well-placed shot would drop it.

Completely out of the water now, the rhino paused for a moment and slowly swung its head around. The animal faced the hunter, locking eyes with him. A split second later, he fired. The sound exploded through the jungle, followed by a sharp agonizing squeal. A hit!

The hunter's blood raced, pounded in his temples. For a moment, the insect buzz stopped, replaced by the roar of a freight train in his ears—then nothing. A moment of jungle silence, as everything alive stopped to observe the sudden passing of one of its own. A dirge throbbed quick-tempo through the hunter's veins.

The rhino, still staring at the hunter, stood for a second unmoving, stood for a second that seemed an eternity. Then, trembling, its legs buckled and it crashed to the ground.

As its body met the jungle floor, armor-plated skin fell away like the shell of a great cracked egg. A single-horned white stallion struggled free, raised up on its hind legs and snorted into the air.

The hunter's eyes bulged wide. His gun fell

(continued)

A Jungle End, continued

clattering into the boat, tripped, and fired a round into his skull.

The unicorn snorted again, then galloped into the jungle. The buzz of insects roared.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

TWO STRANGERS

Two strangers pass in the hall
(Nice place, the hall...do you
Come here often?)
I think you had something to do
With my birth twenty odd years ago,
But I could be mistaken.
Well, anyway, you're looking good
(If not vaguely familiar), you know,
And it was nice talking.
Stop by my bedroom sometime or
Gimme a call when you're in town
(or in the kitchen, by the phone),
Whatever, see ya 'round.

«««««»»»»»

Connie Legters

THE SIEGE

Carl rubbed his arm. That creep had really yanked him, abruptness of the attack, traumatic. He looked over at Polly, his sweet, cheerful Polly. She sat, white-faced behind tissue-clad fingers. Their eyes met, and timidly they touched souls.

All right, they were safe. No one could get to them without cutting through the steel door with its two deadbolts. Carl's fear persisted...could he do that?

Carl and Polly had moved to Golden Arms just three weeks ago, sold their belongings to raise the entrance fee. Now all they'd pay was a monthly rate, within means of their fixed income. No one had told them about the isolation.

Their apartment was on the top floor. When they'd first heard, it pleased them because privacy was the one thing they'd never really had. First, it had been the kids, lively and full of youth, friends coming and going, places to go and things to do. All that had left with the children, but Carl was still working then, and a wave of liberated parents moved into their lives. It was cards, dinners, clubs, lots of involvement to keep them busy.

Then, they had traveled for some years, depending on their family to keep an eye on home while they were gone. Finally, the road had gotten old to them, meanwhile friends drifted off, one way or another. The absurdity of the large home loomed over their practical heads, mortality came knocking at the door when Polly had a slight stroke. So against strong family opposition, the elderly couple sold the house, and made their move to the city to reside at the Golden Arms. Advertised as "adult apartments of shared commitments," the place had sounded just right for them at the time.

Now, Polly made coffee and the two of them sat under the dining room light at the old maple table. Their eyes were riveted to the patio door leading to the balcony.

"We can't go out there," Polly said in a whisper, as if their assailant could overhear what she said, "or he will see where we live and come after us."

She was right and her husband knew it. Carl had always been a gentle man. Now, when he needed the aggression of youth, it lay hidden in fragility of age, hard to find. He would protect her.

When the assault had come, the attacker was intent on harm. The bags of groceries lay behind on the first floor carpet as the fleeing couple rode skyward in the elevator, shaken and pale. No one had looked out to see their struggle. Instinct to survive had prompted Carl to push Polly ahead into the open elevator, then whirl and shove the man backward. The buttons felt like hot coals as he blindly banged for the doors to close. The creep's face was there...so close...when the elevator closed, and the couple rose from the clutches of harm.

Carl and Polly sailed to several different floors before hitting the number five button. When, finally, Polly entered their apartment door, Carl continued on his solitary way to further cover their tracks. When he let himself into home, the two cried in frustration. Never had they been so threatened.

The telephone hung halfway between the dining room and the kitchen. It was a decorator color with a long, hanging cord. Push buttons were white, and beckoned fingers to call for help. The terrified pair could not do that. They had been placed on the waiting list for telephone installation.

"Well, Mommy," Carl said to his wife, "we can always live on beans." Polly smiled at the old expression used many times as the years had passed, when things had been difficult.

The apartment building beneath them felt like an enemy preparing to strike. Carl could see the attacker by

(continued)

peering through the mini-blinds. The creep was opposite the apartment building, scanning all its windows to catch his victims looking for him. Polly tugged at Carl's sleeve, seeing the danger further threatening them even now safe within their home.

"No, Carl," she said, "don't let him find us." Carl stepped back. The elderly couple had no acquaintances in the building. People were not very friendly, the reason now became clear.

Eventually the telephone company would come, this was a certainty they clung to. They would be found, dead or still alive. And so Carl and Polly waited, listening to the hum of traffic five stories down.

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

SUBLIMINAL MESSAGE?

Several years ago, the U.S. government passed a law saying the use of subliminal messages in advertising was illegal. But, if one uses subliminbal messages, then they can't be seen or proven. The government was saying these messages were causing people to do things they would not ordinarily do. I don't think these messages actually even exist. HMPF! Next thing you know, they'll be saying college students use them in their homework....

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

RAIN

Rain, in grade school,
Meant that Mom would be
Coming to get me
In our rusty station wagon,
Breaking the monotony of blackboards
With a lunch of chicken soup,
Grilled cheese sandwiches,
And my shoes in the oven to dry.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

I HAD BEGUN

I had begun to make
My apologies when
A blob of bubbles
Emerged like
A mouthful of Ivory
After teaching Mom
The word shit,
Rinsing my sorries
Into the sink.

«««««»»»»»

Holly Bruns

LIDOCAINE LIFE

By the time she was fifteen, Jenny was anesthetized about life. Nothing moved her. She had stopped feeling sadness years ago. Coincidentally, she had stopped feeling joy at the same time. She didn't even feel anger at the hopelessness. She hadn't cried since she was eight years old. Jenny lived in an emotional vacuum. The vacuum was sucking all the meaning from her life. She was dying for some excitement.

Jenny sat on her bed and fumbled with the gun and the bullets for over an hour, finalizing her decision and trying to figure out how to load and shoot. The smooth, cool metal gave her an artificial feeling of power. She stood in front of the mirror in her bedroom watching herself do various things with the gun. She spread her feet apart, took aim at her reflection, and pretended to shoot the imaginary criminal in the mirror. She put the barrel to her right temple, and with a smile mumbled, "I just can't take another day of this agony." She pretended to shoot herself, making the sound of a gun blast. Next, she stuck the gun barrel in her pocket, and in her best raspy cowboy voice she told the reflection, "Ten paces and draw..." She turned her back to the mirror, paced out ten steps in place, then swung around and faked a shot at her challenger. She blew on the end of the gun barrel then shoved it back into her pocket and smiled at herself in the mirror. The brown-eyed girl stared at her pale face, picked up her hairbrush and ran it through her long hair. She bent over the dresser and put her lips on the mirror and pressed them into the glass with her eyes closed. She backed up and looked at herself again and whispered, "I love you,

(continued)

Jenny..." The gun barrel was pulled from her pocket and pointed to her right temple one more time. Just before she pulled the trigger, she spoke to her familiar image. "I hate you!" She enunciated every word slowly.

The gun went off. The explosion was muffled by its proximity to Jenny's skull. A heavy "uuuhhh" came from her throat as she slumped into a pile on the floor between her bed and hr dresser. On the way down, her face slammed into the corner of her dresser tearing a deep gash in her smooth cheek. A fine spray of blood speckled her mirror, her dresser, the hairbrush, and the note she left behind.

Her nine-year-old sister found her when she got home from school. The little girl threw her backpack and jacket on the floor of the kitchen and settled herself at the kitchen table for cookies and milk. She ran upstairs after her snack to tell Jenny she had met a new friend on the bus. She forgot her friend when she found her sister. She pulled the pile of limpness over to see the face. A long, irregular breath escaped the gray-blue lips along with a trickle of blood. Black and blue eyes bulged from the ghostly face. Little sister ran out in terror to find a neighbor who could help. She stopped only long enough to vomit cookies and milk on the hallway carpet.

It was a breezy, warm day in September. The local children were back in school. The emergency room was quiet. The chaos of repairing lacerations and broken bones leveled off sharply with the end of summer vacation. Patty Hernandez was charting on a patient she had discharged earlier in the day and jumped when the mercy radio started up.

"Edgebrook Medical Center...Edgebrook Medical Center...This is TEN GEORGE FOURTEEN on mercy. Do you copy?"

Patty picked up the receiver, a pen, and paper all at once. "This is Edgebrook Medical Center, TEN GEORGE FOURTEEN. We copy loud and clear, go ahead."

"Edgebrook, we're enroute to your facility with a fifteen-year-old victim of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the right temple. The patient was apneic at the scene of the accident but had a pulse of 48. We intubated and are bagging per ambu and 02. The patient has a BP to 68/20. We have an IV of lactated ringers wide open to maintain the pressure. Pupils are fixed and dilated. Patient does not respond to painful stimulus. There is no exit wound. We have contacted Healthstar. They will meet us on your pad in ten to fifteen minutes. Our ETA to your facility is three minutes. Please have your doctor and staff standing by on your pad. We will not be bringing this patient into your ER. We will transport directly off your pad with Healthstar. We need your doctor for quick assessment in case the intubation is incorrect. We could also use a hand bagging and need another IV line which we have not had time to start. Do you copy, Edgebrook?"

"We copy TEN GEORGE FOURTEEN. We're standing by for your ETA of three minutes. Edgebrook Medical Center, WQX239, clear on mercy." Patty hung up the receiver, yelled for the doctor, then immediately primed an IV line and ran for the helicopter pad with supplies in hand. She didn't notice the beautiful autumn day as she stepped outside. She stood, shifting her weight from foot to foot, and waited with nervous agitation.

The siren could be heard wailing before the ambulance came into view. Patty could feel the adrenalin kicking in. Her heart was pounding fast and her lungs felt like they were taking in twice as much air as they normally did. This was the rush of excitement she lived for. There was no feeling that even came close. She thrived on the stress. Patty didn't need drugs. She had her job. The ambulance screeched to a stop on the drive, fifty yards from the pad, and the driver raced around to open the rear double doors.

Inside, two paramedics were bent over the stretcher. The doctor, a young woman in her thirties, bolted into the ambulance to assess the patient's airway. "You did a good job. Let's get her out of here. I can't move in here and I can't see a thing."

Out into the sunshine they lowered the stretcher. Patty had the IV in and flowing in less than two minutes. She took a blood pressure, "Sixty over twenty," she informed the doctor and the paramedics and then, for the first time, she took a good look at the patient.

It would have been difficult to determine whether or not she had been a pretty girl. The eyes were swollen shut and encircled by dark purple bruises. They bulged from her head like miniature water balloons. Blood oozed slowly from both nostrils and mixed with dried, caked blood on her face. The rip in her cheek was deep. Pink, pearly, fat tissue emerged from the wound. She had a white plastic bag taped around her head to keep the blood and brain matter from spilling out any further. Strands of hair that had not been pushed into the bag hung to the girl's shoulders and the sun reflected off the shiny auburn strands that weren't matted in blood. Her body was thin and well proportioned. Her shirt had been cut away, revealing her small breasts which were now soaking up the sunlight. Her chest was rising and falling in a synchronized rhythm with each squeeze of

(continued)

Lidocaine Life, continued

the bag. The lower half of her body was clothed in brand new, stonewashed blue jeans that fit tightly around her slender hips. She had on blinding white high-top tennis shoes. Not a spot of blood on her shoes. Patty marveled at the impossibility of how that could have happened.

The paramedic was giving the doctor details of how the girl was found at "the scene." He spoke in excited, pressured syllables. "She musta shot herself with a 22. I don't know. The cops have the gun and I didn't see it. Anyway, it was big enough to blow out the other side. It musta just spun around inside somewhere. When I went to intubate her, I had a heck of a time. There was brain matter going down her throat. I was praying I hit the right hole. I figured I musta done okay 'cause I heard lung sounds when we bagged her. You should'a seen the place. Her little sister found her and ran to a neighbor's house. She was standing in the front yard screaming when we got there. The neighbor was trying to hold her back but she was screaming and kicking and trying to get back inside. When we came back out, the poor kid just stood there watching us load up. She must have been in shock or something. She looked pale and numb.

"Where were the kids' parents?" the doctor inquired.

"Beats me. I guess the neighbor told one of our guys that the parents are divorced and the mother is unemployed. Nobody knew where to call her and nobody knows how to contact the father." The paramedic's face was flushed and his eyes were glowing.

The paramedic and the doctor shook their heads in unison, giving the impression that they were both thinking the same thought. Patty watched them, amused by the excited expressions they had on.

The helicopter made a graceful landing. The blades roared a furious announcement of arrival and before they came to a complete stop, three figures in bright orange overalls hunched over the pad to greet the "gunshot wound." They were gone in moments. Patty watched them go, wondering how in the hell the kid's shoes had stayed so white.

«««««»»»»»

Judy Belfield

IMPRESSIONISM

In the distance
trees contort rhythmically
dance a graceful
interpretive ballet
with the wind.
The gray June sky
lies waiting for opportunity
promised in the
whispers of God.
I am taunted
by one of those achingly
beautiful songs
that pulls the soul
like a rubber band
and holds it taut
threatening to pull tighter.
I am confined to senses;
restricted to thoughts
controlled by
what I see, hear, touch.
I experience everything this way
concretely
then subtract myself
from it all;
convert life to words—
an abstract of reality.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

GARAGE FLOOR BAREFOOT

I first saw her at school—this little toy of a girl with exaggerated hair and oversized shoes. She looked like fun.

We ended up in the same bar with groups of friends from class. She sat with anyone, laughed like the rest of us, and always went home alone. A few times she brought girlfriends with her, but they would steal her spotlight and so she normally left them behind.

We could talk in class about anything, I thought, but everything remained hidden. The circles of conversation were like a carousel—an interesting ride but you sure don't get far. In the bar, however, she could reveal more about herself through flirting, smiling, playing games; all done through an alcohol screen thick as cotton candy.

(continued)

Garage Floor Barefoot, continued

After a pitcher of beer, I learned a little about her family. Another night I found out she worked two jobs to support herself and had a vague hope school might set her ahead. I knew if she was depressed because she wouldn't be with us. When she came back the next night she would buy and smile, "I have some catching up to do."

Occasionally we would sit together, legs brushing up against each other, sharing a single glass in a mock relationship. I came in late once and found her sitting on a man's lap. When she got up to use the ladies' room, he followed her and so did I. "You saved me, Andy," she yelled, stumbling into my arms and leaving the silly body standing at the sink.

Later that night she took out some money to pay our bill. I teased her, trying to pull the money out of her hands, begging for the twenty. She stood opposite me. "What will you give me for it?" I had my hands on her legs, just below her buttocks, where there was a little more flesh than I expected. I tried pulling her towards me. I moved to kiss her and caught an earlobe instead of my objective.

"Wait," she said. "Let me go pay the bill."

Then she was gone.

She wasn't in class the next day or at the bar that night. I searched through the phone book for her name, made several wrong calls, and finally found her. I felt the triumph of a nine-year-old Hide-And-Seek contestant when someone else is captured and must be "It."

"We'll be at the bar tonight," I said, suddenly surrounding myself with friends, afraid to be alone with her. "Are you coming?"

"My husband graduated from boot camp yesterday," she said. "I don't think I'll be going out this weekend."

She never came back to our bar, although that Monday in class she asked, "Are you mad at me?"

I smiled that she would think of it and said, "No."

Months later, we were at a party in a friend's garage. She was barefoot and sitting across from me in our circle of friends, like a fallen Ring-Around-the-Rosie chain. I heard her telling a girl next to her that sometimes she just needed men to sit with her, touch her every once in awhile, almost kiss, and be gone. The conversation turned, but I saw her looking at me, and I knew that she loved me.

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

BOY, I'M IN A PICKLE

Boy, I'm in a pickle. I really don't relish the thought of this assignment. Y'know, I'm no hot dog, I'm just trying hard not to make hamburger out of my grade. But *this* poem is going to need plenty of mustard on it in order to ketchup to my other ones. Let me be frank with you here: I've merely tried to sandwich some juicy ideas around the real meat of this thought, and believe me, it's been no picnic...

«««««»»»»»

Bethany Jackson

THE VASE

Smooth carved vase—
Soft and delicate as a woman's figure—
Ivory rose petal tresses
Mount her form
She stands alone on a desk
Remembering locks of red and pink
When she was young and the minute cracks did not crawl
down her yellowing figure
When the water was fresh—pure—and she naive to
nature
To decay
Now she knows death and
How replaceable an existence is
Replaceable
And she waits

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

I CAUGHT YOUR VOICE

I caught your voice
In a jelly jar
And kept it
In my refrigerator.
When I get home
Late at night,
You welcome me
With a
Sandwich and a smile.

«««««»»»»»

Lora Baker

WORDS

Words gush out of your mouth
float into the air
bounce off the walls,
ceilings, floor, my face,
then dissipate
into nothingness.
Empty, worthless nothings
never to be heard again.
Why are they taken so seriously?

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

THROUGH THE GREEN

Through
The green of
The whale-roads
And the
Sands of
The walrus and the Carpenter
I long for one solitary wave,
A Surf U.K.,
To pull me
Away.

«««««»»»»»

Barbara Pillasch

GAY BLADE I

There once live a lover named Slade
Who betrayed many an innocent maid
He fell for a hefty gal named Annie
Who said, "Cheat on me and I'll kick your fannie!"
So sweet Annie's the last maid he laid.

***

GAY BLADE II

There once lived a lover named Slade
Who betrayed many an innocent maid
    Bedded ladies down
    All around town
Just to prove he could still make the grade.

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

I WILL WRITE ABOUT NOTHING

I will write about nothing.
I will not write of our planet, Earth
I will not speak of death or birth
I will avoid thoughts of sky or sea
I promise not to mention you or me
I will write about nothing.
I want not to whine over some special love
I shalt not speaketh of God above
I dare not creep you with sounds of Hell
I just won't say anything, I've nothing to tell
I will write about nothing.
I will not discuss my personal life
I don not know who's slept with whose wife
I won't reveal the thoughts in my head
I will not ponder over the lives that we've led
I will write about nothing.
I won't reminisce of how it used to be
I guess I won't suppose about World War III
I couldn't even tell you about peace or war
I don't even know what this poem's for, but yet—
I have written about everything...

«««««»»»»»

Shane Van Veghel

A MAN ONCE HAD A DREAM

A man once had a dream. He dreamt that he was riding a horse. He felt free and powerful. The wind was rushing through his hair and he laughed. Taken away by his feelings of joy, he lost control and fell. Now, he suddenly found himself being dragged behind the horse. He thought of the woman he adored and the life he loved. Now he was going to die. He would never again see the people he loved or do the things he so enjoyed. Just as despair was going to overtake him, a K-Mart employee unplugged the machine.

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

THE LATEST IN HAIKUS

Here's the latest in haikus-the linear model-saves up to two lines.

«««««»»»»»

Judy Belfield

DRIFTINGS

On full-moon nights
silver reflections
flicker in your eyes
and mirror the light-spattered darkness.
I see through time in the twinklings;
from today a melt of yesterday
into a blurred tomorrow—
a synthesis of colors blended
from moments before and not yet.
There is a magic in the works,
a production not yet refined:
we are Michelangelo's fingers
waiting for the marble
to dictate shape.
We are not concerned
how it ends
overwhelmed as we are
by moonlight
and other cliches.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

THIS TIME

He walks continuously, past people, houses, cars; when the tape in his Walkman stops and he turns it over; when his hand tires from carrying the little noisemaker, the strap of which had long ago broken on another walk; when his feet tire; when his mind tires. He walks on.

The music fills his ears and forces the muscles in his legs to continue their movement, however exhausted they may be. It drives him like the passing cars.

He mouths the words of the songs, not confident enough to use his own voice. The beat is more important, of more use to him. It pounds as if in mockery of his own heartbeat or the sounds of his shoes hitting the street. It almost blocks the sounds of happy children.

He leaves his neighborhood, escaping perfect middle class kids with Kool-Aid smiles and dirty knees. He passes sensible fuel-efficient cars with worthless stuffed animals pressed into their windows. He passes the homes with matching curtains and blinds. He walks out on his life.

Down hills and across railroad tracks he travels, dressed in sneakers, shorts, and t-shirt. He carries the expensive Walkman like a cross he must bear, a heavy dying bird clutched in his fist.

He moves onto the busier streets, where trucks mix into the road's steady diet of cars. Each time one passes him, his long hair is blown forward into his eyes and mouth. He brushes it back with an angry gesture and continues walking. Often he makes eye contact with a driver, but sees nothing.

Shattered glass danger finds its way into his path. an animal, a fellow traveler, is discovered broken on the street's edge. He continues.

A garage comes into view, with a barking dog at the door. The mechanic looks at him as he passes, then looks back at his work. Both had averted their eyes at the last possible second, so as to avoid the necessity of a greeting.

Cheap diners, gas stations, abandoned cars begin to fill in the holes where homes might have once been. The quality of the town steadily decreases. Bars emerge. More glass, more broken buildings.

Now an occasional house interrupts the dead flow. An old black man sits on a tree stump and slices government-issue cheese for a meal. Mothers throw wet laundry over a porch rail for lack of a proper clothesline, much less an electric dryer.

The music in his Walkman plays on.

No one meets his eyes now. They hardly notice another person trying to escape in this part of town.

Sometimes he believes he can walk forever; on to the highway ramp, off into another state, somewhere far away. Wisconsin, maybe. There isn't much broken glass on the streets of Wisconsin.

Less than half a mile from the interstate, a car slows, then pulls up beside. The window rolls down and his slobbering mother wrapped in curlers and curse words, cries, "God damn it, get in this car! I ought to beat the shit out of you..."

He almost got away this time.

He is twelve years old.

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

HELEN KELLER HAIKU

I would write one but
these spirit masters aren't made
for writing in Braille

«««««»»»»»

Sha[illegible]reenwalt

THE [illegible]RESENCE

I have felt it.
no shape, no form,
just a presence;
A heavy weight,
A heavy weigh,
that falls on the midnight hour;
in the half light.
Yes I have felt it,
I have felt death.

«««««»»»»»

Shenon Wright

TIPS FOR MORE INTERESTING LIVING

—Rebellion is boring. Try to find uniqueness in staying within the norm. Too many fighting conformity creates a trend.
—Humor makes life more fun. Try to find humor in trivial things by searching for one character that makes it funny. Soon, you will have mastered frivolity and laughter will be your second language.
—Watching classic black and white films in the 1990s is "Yuppie." Finding intellectual stimulation in your favorite soap opera is the new trend. Keeping soaps in perspective by realizing the difference between *All My Children* and *Gone With the Wind* is the first step. Elaborate on this by laughing at an overly dramatic moment and enjoying a great tear-jerking scene.
—Pretend your mother really knows best, do what she says and see what happens.
—Before you go to bed tonight, think of someone that makes you happy. What would that person say or do to make you feel loved and secure? Fall asleep with these thoughts.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF MY SCAR

On the anniversary of my scar
I began to shed my skin
And sat, snakelike, in the sun,
Occasionally rubbing against a rock
To aid the creation of my new personality.

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

I DON'T CARE

I don't care about polka dots and plaid
I don't care if my writing is bad
I don't care about an apostrophe
I don't care about crossing my t's
I don't care if my head turns bald
I don't care about the names I've been called
I don't care if my car isn't new
I don't care if my eyes aren't blue
I don't care that my phone just rang
I don't care about dialectic slang
I don't care if I'm an hour late
I don't care if my verse aint great

The things that matter most to me
Are the things in life with integrity.

I don't care what's your color of skin
I don't care if you're fat or thin
I don't care about the holes in your jeans
I don't care what welfare means
I don't care if your body is frail
I don't care if you can only read Braille
I don't care that you barely eat
I don't care that you toil in your feet.

It doesn't matter if you have no money
As long as you live by honesty.

I don't care about stately things
I don't care abut your diamond rings
I don't care what you get for free
I don't care about quality
I don't care about your high-priced trends
I don't care about your Mercedes-Benz
I don't care abut your jaded world
I don't care if you're "only a girl"
I don't care for your plastic face
I don't care for your phony grace
I don't care for your gift-wrapped smile
I don't care for your store-bought style

Take your Gucci, Saks, and Esprit
And trade them for a little generosity.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

THE ENVIRONMENT WAS SLEEPING

The environment was sleeping.
The darkness said nothing
And neither did the rain.
The air was barely there—
A little whisper to the leaves
When it thought no one would hear.
The night embraced all of us,
Except the moon punching
Through its barriers,
Except a star or two
In pale imitation,
Except me.

«««««»»»»»

Bethany Jackson

FIRE

Under the shaded amber moon we slept
While visions danced around gold fire light
So soft the sound of their footprints in the night
That they were inaudible to ears that wept

The blackest tree of love did rustle its fruit
Above our heads, exposing sin's old taunt
I watched your pale face and form grow gaunt
Like Adam and Eve our sense was not acute

For we devoured blossoms still of green
Impatiently we sucked lust's sweet juice
And out of greed and thirst we drank love dry

We knew not passion's pain at seventeen
Or of the dignity it will reduce;
We set dream's feet afire and saw them die

«««««»»»»»

Barbara Pillasch

LEAF DRIFT

October escorts
the autumn river as she
meanders downstream

«««««»»»»»

Carol Spinabella

CONVENTIONAL LOVE POEM?

~~Love you.~~
~~Yes I do.~~
~~What's a girl to do?~~
~~Oh how I love you.~~

Well, actually, I *like* you a lot. It's hard to say if it's love just yet, but it's really close. Let's just say that I'm crazy "in like" because *love* is such a strong word and is used to lightly these days, I think. However, if you keep doing likable things and I keep liking you more over time then I will *love* you soon, I predict.

I like you a lot.
even though love it's not.
But when I decide it's so,
you'll be the first to know.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

PLEASE DON'T HIDE YOUR HANDS

Please don't hide your hands
By crossing your arms that way.
I want to watch them,
Your artist's hands,
Chiseling me into what you want
With this argument.

«««««»»»»»

Rich Transon

UNBELIEVER

With a flick of his wrist and a flash of light the magician made the black cat reappear. The small crowd that had gathered on the sidewalk applauded. A small, blonde haired boy standing in front, asked in awe, "How did you do that?"

"Magic."

A mocking little laugh came from the back of the crowd.

"What the matter, good sir; don't you believe in magic?" asked the magician.

The crowd parted slightly so the two opponents could see each other more clearly. The man who had laughed was tall with short brown hair parted down the

(continued)

side. His narrow nose and elongated face made him look even taller. His lips were twisted in a perpetual scowl and his dark gray business suit marked him as a conservative.

"There's no such thing," he said.

"What is your name, sir?"

"Dave Plank," he replied.

"Well, Dave, surely you believe in miracles. And what is a miracle, but magic?" said the magician.

"I don't believe in miracles, either," Dave said. Shaking his head, the magician said, "Then I feel sorry for you."

Dave snorted and walked away. Magic, what nonsense, he thought. His thoughts were interrupted when he walked into his office.

He didn't think about his encounter with the magician until his ride home that night. He was driving along a stretch of deserted highway when a thick fog began to roll over the street. It formed a wall of fog that hovered a few feet above the ground. There was a gap in the fog where Dave was driving to. It was almost a tunnel through the fog. It reminded him of cheap special effects magicians employ to distract their audience while they work their "magic." Thinking about the magician, Dave let his eyes wander off the road for just a minute. When he looked back, he was staring at two bright lights bearing down on him. There was a loud crunch and a bright flash of light, then Dave slipped into oblivion...

When Dave regained consciousness, he saw he was lying in an open meadow. Lush, green grass rolled out in all directions. Large grassy knolls were in abundance and trees dotted the landscape.

Dave sat up and rubbed his eyes. He had no idea where he was, but he felt great. The air seemed to permeate with goodness. A soft breeze carried the scent of luscious berries to his nostrils and his stomach answered with a rumble.

Looking to the north, Dave saw a clump of bushes; the dark red berries visible from where he was standing. He was about to head for the bushes when he heard a voice from behind him.

"There you are. I've been looking all over for you."

Dave turned and confronted the man. He was old and friendly looking. All of his hair, including his beard and mustache, was white. He walked slightly stooped but sure-footed. His face had an open expression of friendship amidst all the wrinkles.

"Who are you?" Dave asked.

"I'm Believer. Your guide."

"Who? Guide for what?"

"My name is Believer and I'm your guide on your quest." He was smiling.

"Quest for what?" Dave asked warily.

"Why, the quest to defeat the Unbeliever, naturally," Believer said with the same smile.

Dave was getting just a little tired of the old man's smile. He wanted nothing more than to beat it off the old man's face. But, through a superhuman effort, he gained control of himself.

"Who is this Unbeliever and why do I want to defeat him?"

The old man sighed. "This is going to take longer than I thought. Why don't you eat while I explain."

"Good idea."

Dave started off toward the berries when Believer tapped him on the shoulder. He turned and saw a fell basket of berries at Believer's feet.

"How did you do that?" Dave asked.

"I believed."

"I don't get it."

"I believe in magic, therefore I was able to bring the berries here using magic," Believer said.

"I don't believe in—"

"That's your problem, you don't believe. Sit down and eat your berries, and I'll explain it as best I can."

Dave sat and tentatively popped a berry into his mouth. It was better than anything he ever had. He began shoveling berries into his mouth by the handfuls. When Dave was done wiping away the sticky berry juice from his face, Believer began.

"All of this," he gestured broadly, "is in your mind; the hillocks, the berries, and even me. It may seem familiar to you because you used to daydream about this place. You and your friends make-believed that you performed great deeds of heroism."

"Wait a second. I find this hard to belie—credit. Everything, even you, is in my head? C'mon, man. Do you think I'm a fool?" David said incredulously.

"Keep quiet and hold still," the old man commanded. "Don't interrupt me again. Now then, everything I said is true. There are two opposing forces in your conscience: the Believer, that's me, and the Unbeliever. When you were just a boy, I wasn't as you see me now. I was strong, proud and powerful. The Unbeliever had to keep in the shadows lest he incur my displeasure."

For a moment, Believer's eyes took on a distant,

(continued)

Unbeliever, continued

dreamy look, but then he came back to reality. "But over the years, you stopped believing. The Unbeliever has grown in power and I'm this wasted shell of my former self. This meadow is my last bastion of resistance.

Dave felt pity for the poor man, but he wasn't sure what to believe. He needed answers.

"What does this have to do with me? And why am I here now?"

"Do you remember the fog and bright lights?"

"Yes."

"You hit a van head on. You're dying. You would be dead now if I didn't use nearly all my remaining power to bring you here. You need a miracle to live, and the only way that can happen is if you truly believe. That's why you must defeat the Unbeliever," said Believer.

"How do I do that?" asked Dave

"You must use magic. And to use magic, you must believe. Believe David Plank!"

Dave doubled over as he felt a sharp pain in his stomach.

"Quickly, you are dying. Do you believe or not?"

"I believe," Dave said rising to his feet though in his heart he was still unsure.

Believer led David through the meadow. They walked past a magnificent castle off to the west.

"That's where I battled the dragon!" he exclaimed He turned, red-faced, towards Believer. "I mean, when I was a boy I pretended to slay a dragon on that castle's battlements."

"Now you begin to truly believe, don't you?" the old man asked softly.

"I'm beginning to believe," Dave said, almost to himself.

Dave wasn't sure but he thought that Believer wasn't as stooped as he was before. And was that some brown hair among the white?

As they walked farther the grass slowly turned yellow and died. There were only dead trees and dirt. The berry bushes had disappeared.

"What's wrong? I never thought of this before," Dave said.

"It's the Unbeliever. He has twisted and unmade much of your imagination as well as beliefs."

They continued walking for a few more minutes, then Believer stopped.

"I cannot go further. Unbeliever is too strong. It's up to you now." He disappeared.

David took a breath to steady himself, then continued onward. After about a hundred yards, he saw a figure facing away from him. As he walked up to him David asked, "Who are you?"

"I'm Unbeliever," said a very familiar voice.

As Unbeliever faced Dave, he gasped. The Unbeliever looked exactly like himself. He was the Unbeliever! David's mind raced. Believer told him to use magic, so that's what he would do. This was his childhood land of make-believe, so he would do just that, make-believe. He pretended a bolt of lightning tearing through the sky to strike the Unbeliever, but as the bolt sizzled towards its target, it fizzled out. Next Dave had a tree fall on the Unbeliever, but it passed right through him. Time and again, David cast a spell and time and again it had no effect on the Unbeliever.

Dave felt another searing pain in his stomach. He was running out of time, he had to get out quick or he would die. Then Dave had a flash of insight. His spells didn't work on the Unbeliever because he didn't believe. But David did believe, so if he cast it on himself it should work. He imagined himself by the car wreck.

Unbeliever stood still waiting for time to kill David. Too late, he realized that Dave had gone. Dave believed in himself, he believed he couldn't fail, so he didn't

David opened his eyes. He was lying on loose gravel on the side of the road. A paramedic was leaning over him.

"He's alive," she shouted over her shoulder to someone he couldn't see.

"It's a miracle that you're alive," she told him.

Smiling, he said, "I believe you."

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

I UNPLUGGED MY ALARM CLOCK

I unplugged my alarm clock
So we could have more time together.
But you don't believe in magic—
That if you hold your breath you don't need air,
That if you catch lightning bugs in a jar they'll glow
forever,
That adults are really just tall children who forgot how
to play on the swings,
That hiding the truth isn't a lie.
I cast a spell by pulling the electric cord
And stopping time for us.
What did you have to keep your watch on for?

«««««»»»»»

Jelfield

A LITTLE WORSE FOR WEAR

I am the lights
strung up weeks ago,
the garlands, the holly
red bows
the scent of evergreens
echo of bells
rung on Christmas
yesterday—
an old decoration
clinging to pillars
the stairway
the front door
anywhere I can.
Dry heat pries up
transparent tape
which crackles to the touch.
I am coming away again
hanging lopsided
sadly needing support.
But this holiday
is over

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

APOSTROPHITIS
(The Revenge of Ititis)

Y'know, I jus' can't und'rstand s'mtimes. Sum peopl' git so ben' outta shape if ya don' use an apostrophe. They take p'rson'l offense to it all. I ges it's jus' one o' those thin's that'll ne'er e'er ent'r my head 'n' mak'a 'ho' lot o' sense t'me. It's pr'tty clear t'me that th' entire situation isn't as import'nt as sum folks make it out t'be. That th'r' dum' lil' ol' apostrophe don' mak'a whole helluva lotta diffr'nce if ya as' me. One dum' lil' line ain't gonna hav'a 'ho' lotta 'fect on th' outcome of th' meanin' of what i'm a-tryin' t'say. I mean, c'mon, duz it really matt'r wheth'r or not I use that dum' lil' line 'slong as I git th' poin' across? I think sum peopl' outta jus'ettle down 'n' pond'r 'bout what what I'm try'n t'say. Th'r ain't no need fer sumone t'hafta use sum dum' ol' line if they'nt want'n t'use it anyways. Trus' me, it's just something that's used for its vanity...

«««««»»»»»

Holly Bruns

MAIL ARMOR

There you were,
protected by your shiny suit,
your reflective metal shell.
I thought that you were my desire.
Your strength and beauty were everything
I ever dreamed of.
I was trained to adore a male.

I captured you gallant knight,
or did you capture this maiden fair?
The truth is hard to determine.
I couldn't wait to remove your armor,
to uncover the prize inside.

It took some doing...
Finally the armor was removed
and the dark stranger inside was revealed.
He was too small to wear such an ominous suit.
I saw him cry (more than once) with emotion.
He wasn't nearly as strong as the first time I saw him.
I was afraid.

He took to much. He gave too much.

His suit of armor rusted away in the closet
of the guest room.
A room reserved for overnight visits of the closest
friends.
No guest had ever slept there.

I watched as the male larvae hatched from his metal
cocoon
and move about unburdened by his one-way mirror.
I agonized the loss of my own reflection.
I couldn't see my image looking back at me any longer.
So I ran to the bedroom mirror.
He followed.

I was entirely covered by a crinkled layer of aluminum
foil.
When he pulled me close enough to kiss me,
he smiled instead,
enjoying the playful, distorted image of a male smiling
back.

«««««»»»»»

Barbara Pillasch

ARRIVAL

Mute, minute
twisted
bundle of bones
eighty-five years
eighty-five pounds

White lights
white walls
white nurses
assault
her waiting eyes
I wore my red sweater today.

We wait
her eyes
glance beyond me
and smile
I know
he's arrived

Well, hi, I say
you sure took
your sweet time
I say, so long
I'll see ya
Mom

And he takes her
delicately.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

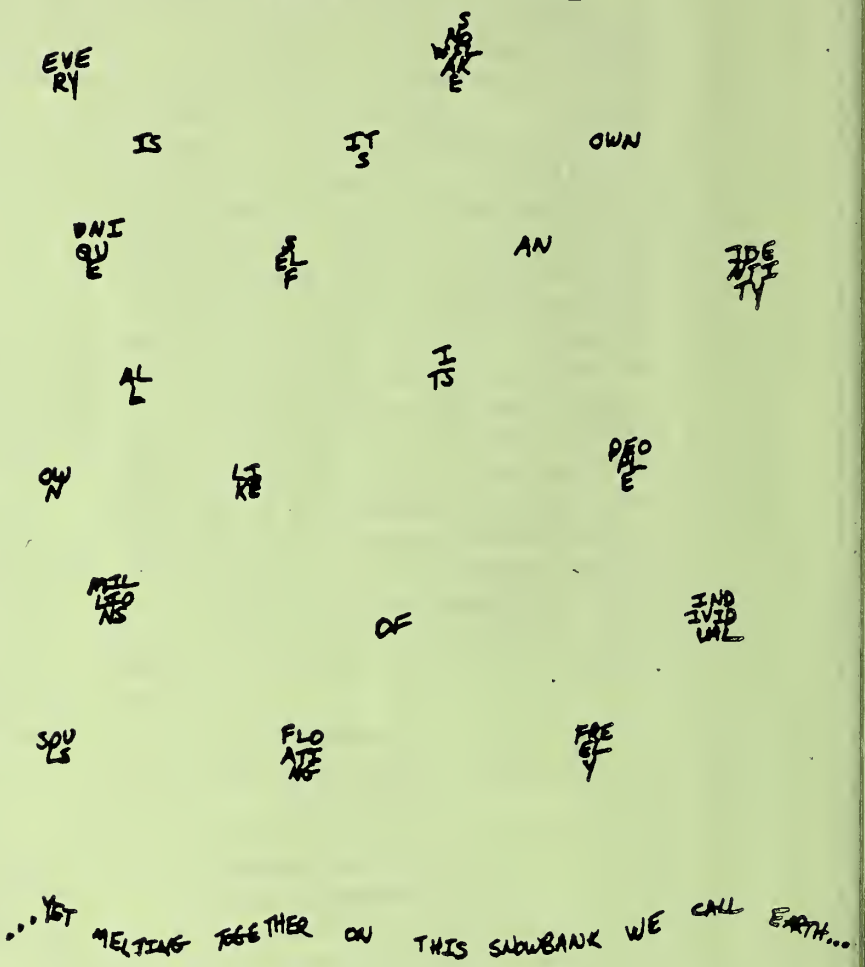
I'M NOT AN ENGLISH IDEAL

I'm not an English ideal
Sitting here writing lines leaking
romance into our atmosphere.
I'm a strange half breed
of cynic and something else
damned if I know what.
But if you could accept these offerings,
I could be persuaded to shut up
every so often.

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

EVERY SNOWFLAKE



Every snowflake is its own unique self
An identity all its own
Like people—
Millions of individual souls
Floating freely
Yet melting together on this snowbank.

«««««»»»»»

Barbara Pillasch

AH-CHOO!

On a warm day the wind is a "breeze"
On a cold day it's "windy"—we freeze
It's a "breeze when it's hot
It's "windy" when it's not
Either way, it still makes me sneeze.

«««««»»»»»

Connie Legters

LOST?

He said,
in my sleep
I call my name.
Am I lost?
Have I slipped between
the cracks,
and can't get back?

Do I roam
amongst the dead,
and only live
when someone calls
my name?
Is it a trick
to coax me
through doors to nowhere?

I don't know
how to find myself,
lost in sleep,
I never would have dreamed
that I call
to me,
except he said.

«««««»»»»»

Barbara Pillasch

KNOCK-KNOCK

When I was a child
from a stranger's eyes
I'd run
under Mother's bed
wrapped in
swaddling dark
I'd lie
dust-puff playmates
caressed my cheek
lulled my fears to sleep

now
when the stranger raps
the grown-up lady
answers
the child still runs

«««««»»»»»

Robert Franklin

I'M STANDING AT THE WINDOW

I'm standing at the window
With the stars gleaming bright
There's a soft cool breeze
And my head feels light
I see my breath on the pane
While thoughts run wild
cold glass on my forehead
And a troubled smile
'I love you' I think
And deny the charge
But the emotion is heavy
And my heart is large
'Just friends' I mumble
Despite our flirting
I edit my thoughts
and dance with the wording
So the things I say
And the depth I feel them
are wrapped in a joke
So you'll laugh when you hear them
The more we're together
The jokes will trail
The depths of my feelings
will resound like a bell
This is the time you have the cue
Is it "Yes, let's go out." or
"No, I...ah...have the flu."

«««««»»»»»

Carol Spinabella

ODE TO SMOKERS

Excuse me, Sir. May I have a breath of air?
Excuse me, Ma'am. I see you don't care,
but I have chosen **not** to smoke.
To me, lung cancer is not a joke.

You'll die early,
you'll help me die young,
and you directly affect your unborn one.

I hate your stinky ashes
and detest your smelly clothes
but it's your inconsiderate self
that I truly loathe.

«««««»»»»»

Holly Bruns

ITALIAN NOVOCAINE

Fierce and angry pain
keeps me up at night,
hurts more when I bite,
making me insane.

Would you please explain
why something small and white
can make me so uptight.
I need some Novocaine!

Novocaine must be injected?
Please knock me out before the shot.
I don't want to feel the sting.

Aaahhh...fuzzy nothing I've detected,
Nitrous Oxide hites the spot!
Feeling nothing is my thing.

**

ELIZABETHAN NOVOCAINE

A fierce and angry pain
keeps me up at night,
driving me insane,
hurts more when I bite.

Would you tell me why
this enamel white and small,
makes me want to see this guy?
Most sadistic guy of all!

«««««»»»»»

Shannon Greenwalt

FANTASIA

Picture life in a world where
right and wrong do not exist;
And the only paths in life
are those on which your heart leads
And your dreams accompany you.

«««««»»»»»

NOVOCAINE VILLANELLE
(Minus the Iambic Pentameter)

I feel nothing best of all.
No good, no bad, no joy or pain,
Life is easier when it's dull.

When fickle emotions come to call
I flip a switch inside my brain,
I feel nothing best of all.

Guided missiles, hostages, communist wall,
Garbage dumps, toxic waste, acid rain,
Life is easier when it's dull.

There's too much here inside my skull,
I'm afraid I'll go insane.
I feel nothing best of all.

When mocking tears of torment fall
I pretend they're cellophane.
Life is easier when it's dull.

Valium, Xanax, Alcohol,
Exogenous Novocaine.
I feel nothing best of all.
Life is easier when it's dull.

**

Novocaine must be injected?
Please knock me out before the shot.
Ahhh...fuzzy nothing I've detected,
Nitrous Oxide hits the spot.

I don't want to feel the sting.
Feeling nothing is my thing.

Maria Mellinger

AFTER A NIGHT OF MUSIC

After a night of music,
The return to
Books, poetry, words,
And creative silence
Is deafening.

«««««»»»»»

Judy Belfield

HARANGUE MERINGUE

Her speech, like a spring,
unwound from a tight coil
quickly, never slowing
for ten minutes or so
then, suddenly, stopped.
The restaurant became
strangely possessed
of dish sounds
waitress and cook voices,
the hum of conversation.
I waited for the other shoe to drop.
Then, as if she'd been re-wound
the "on" lever released,
her frenzied speaking resumed
each word pushing the other
into heaps and heaps
madly, frantically.
How did she breathe?
Is it possible
to talk faster
and still be understood?
Silence again.
Silence.
Silence
charged with anticipation...
dread.
Chinese water torture
must be like this.

«««««»»»»

Maria Mellinger

HER CALENDAR IS FILLED

Her calendar is filled
with the days her friends got shot,
the days their wakes were held,
the mornings of their funerals—
there are no empty boxes.
Her neighborhood is the great social equalizer—
no matter what gang they lived in,
they're all dead in her desktop graveyard.

«««««»»»»

June Johnson

ZIPPERS

Zones

Interface

Provide

Propriety

Engender

Restriction

Secure

Zones
Interface
Provide
Propriety
Engender
Restriction
Secure

«««««»»»»

Maria Mellinger

A VERY SHORT STORY

The 3 of them sat, at 3 a.m., in the 24 hour restaurant. 2 of them were dressed in black, the 3rd in a navy blue turtleneck. He hoped that in the dim light of a Saturday night in Joliet, Illinois, they wouldn't notice he was not wearing black.

It was all very symbolic.

«««««»»»»

Chad Elmore

SO CLOSE BUT SO FAR AWAY

From the windshield, it looked like Rico was chasing a wall of cotton that kept just ahead of his bumper. The headlights only made the wall look deeper and denser. The wall was not only in front of him, it was behind him, beside him, above him, and the longer it took him to navigate the Blazer around the blind bends and hidden bumps, the deeper it became under him. The snow had started falling around eleven that morning, and by eleven-thirty, there was an inch on the ground. It was almost two o'clock now, and the snow showed no interest in letting up. The wind was blowing straight out of the west, in the direction he was going, at over twenty miles an hour.

(continued)

So Close But So Far Away, continued

Kathryn had not said a word since they left the warmth of the cabin, and Rico was not sure whether she was quiet out of fright or hatred. They had been staying at a mountain cabin owned by the Science Department at the University of Colorado in Boulder with ten other geology majors, studying glaciers above timberline on a half dozen mountains. The other students stayed at the remote cabin. Rico would have preferred to stay there, but he could not afford to miss another day of work.

Kathryn had complained all weekend. She didn't understand why they had to camp so far in the mountains in late November when the glaciers were there all year long. If she wasn't only cold, she was tired and hungry. When she heard Rico was leaving early Sunday morning, she wasted not time in telling him she would be going with him. Rico wanted to say no, but he couldn't think of any reason other than that he just did not enjoy her presence, so he said, "fine."

It had been clear and cold all weekend but Sunday morning a large bank of dark clouds began building up along the continental divide and the wind had increased. There was a front coming in, he knew, and he did not want to be trapped in a blizzard along the miles of narrow roads he had to go over to get home. Especially with Kathryn in the passenger seat. Rico waited by the cabin's wood stove until she was ready to leave at 10:30, two hours after he'd told her he wanted to leave.

Now they were creeping along at a speed that barely moved the speedometer off of zero. Rico drove by trial-and-error—if the Blazer started to rise on the right side or dip on the left, he knew he was close to the edge, and with a rush of bright-brewed adrenalin, would correct the wheel quickly. Driving up to the cabin early the Friday before, he noticed these things about the road that were worrying him intensely now. On one side, now to his left, the edge of the road dropped quickly to the valley for several hundred feet below, to his right, the edge of the road rose quickly. The road between the two extremes had once been a narrow gauge railroad bed, barely enough room for Rico' Blazer. Today he could see neither side through the snow, but in his mind's eye they were burning brightly. He kept as close to the right side of the road as possible, and leaned close to the windshield and stared into the white.

"If we can make it to the main road before dark we'll be okay," said Rico, "there are houses along it."

"How far?" asked Kathryn.

"It shouldn't be more than ten miles. Less than ten."

At the speed they were going, the windshield wipers could barely push the snow off of the glass. The wheels spun occasionally, but the four-wheel drive kept them moving forward. Slowly.

Sometimes it was so hard to see where they were going Rico would have to stop and study the area somewhere in front of him before moving on. He held the steering wheel like his hands were welded to it. He knew of a few places along the road he could pull off into and wait the storm out, but he had not idea where they were and how he would find them if he did. He'd never seen snow fall like this. At least it was keeping Kathryn quiet.

Rico looked over at her briefly to make sure she hadn't gotten out while he was staring ahead. They were going slow enough for her to do that. She was there, staring out also, with both arms pulled inside her blue parka, her large hood hiding her voice.

The wind blew the snow over the rear of Rico's Blazer with such a loud roar it was very hard to talk normally. It didn't concern him that Kathryn did not like him. He had put up with more than his share of racial hatred in his twenty-three years of existence as a black male, so the fact that Kathryn believed her race was superior in everything but basketball only made him thankful he was black. Kathryn was a bitch.

Suddenly, the Blazer rose on the right front corner. Rico moved the wheel slightly to the left. The Blazer found level ground again but then began to dip violently downward on the left. He could imagine the wheel spinning in the snow-filled air, dangling over the valley below. He looked over at Kathryn who had said something he didn't catch. She was crouched over, her head buried in her parka.

Rico held the brakes on the Blazer, though he could feel it sliding to the left, so he jabbed the shifter into reverse, and using his right foot for the gas pedal, pressed it as he slowly and reluctantly let up off the brakes. He left the wheel spin momentarily and finally find something to grip in the snow. The Blazer began to back up, and finally all four wheels sat on level solid ground. Rico put the selector in park and waited until he felt he knew where the road went.

"You all right?" asked Rico.

"Uh-huh. Let's just get out of here. Now," Kathryn said from within her parka.

Rico shook his head and took a deep breath, then shifted the transmission back into low. He turned the wheels slightly to the right, and gave the engine just enough gas to move the wheels. He felt they'd moved only two feet when he suddenly felt very hot. His eyes widened. He did not need to be able to see the scenery to know he'd made an error.

(continued)

The front of the Blazer dipped down again without warning. Rico stepped on the brake pedal but they kept moving. Down. Rico slipped the transmission into reverse and pushed the gas pedal to the floor. He could hear the engine rev and the four tires whine as they tried to find something to hold on to , but the Blazer was starting to slide forward. They were going down. There was nothing he could do to stop it. He wasn't sure what gear it would be best to be in for the descent, so he left it in reverse, hoping it might slow them down a little.

"Oh shoot! Hold on Kathryn! We are going down!"

Kathryn started screaming. The Blazer started down the mountainside.

Rico was wondering what it was going to take to stop them when the Blazer began fishtailing and started to slide down the mountain sideways. For a brief moment he felt they were slowing down, but the Blazer rolled on its right side. Kathryn screamed louder. She was calling Rico names. It was his fault. She was going to die. Rico turned the ignition off when they started to tip. They barrel-rolled softly until the right side slammed violently into a pine tree whose limbs dropped their collection of snow onto the twisted and crumpled vehicle.

Rico opened his eyes. They had landed on their wheels. Snow blew through the missing windshield and landed on him. It was getting dark out. He must have blacked out. He was freezing. Kathryn was quiet.

"Hey Kathryn," Rico said as he reached over and prodded the blue mound next to him.

"I'm here," she said.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes. I'm fine. What are we going to do now?"

"I think we are stuck here until the snow stops. We'd only get lost if we leave now." The Blazer had become almost completely buried, and the wind blew snow in their faces. It had to be much below zero.

"We have to get out of here, though," said Rico, "this is going to be an icebox. We'll..."

"Oh yeah! And go sit in the snow? I am not leaving here."

Rico knew he couldn't leave Kathryn. If they were going to survive, they would have to go it together. Night was coming and they were stuck. He talked her into moving to the back seat. The windows were broken back there too, but not as bad as in front. A roll bar over the rear seat prevented the roof from collapsing as far in front, so with the tall front seats and low roof, they were relatively protected from the wind.

He was tired and very hungry, not to mention cold. The only food he had with him was two cans of regular Alpo which he carried in his small survival bench in the center console of the Blazer. He carried Alpo because he knew he'd never eat it unless he had to, so he never had to worry about snacking on his survival food. Now he couldn't bear to touch it. Not now, at least. Kathryn would have none of it. Only a few bags had been lost as the Blazer tossed about, so Kathryn and Rico pulled everything out of them and buried themselves with the assorted clothes. He tried to talk with her. It was almost completely dark, and he was afraid they might fall asleep. He talked until she said something he could not understand. She was mumbling like she was drunk. Rico reached out and touched her shoulder. She was shivering violently.

"You're getting hypothermia, Kathryn! Damnit, why didn't you say something before?"

"I'm so cold."

"We have to get in the same sleeping bag or we are not going to make it."

"Jesus," Kathryn mumbled. "You are sick. You're to close to me as it is."

"You are going to die if you don't get warm soon. We've got to get out of these clothes and in the same sleeping bag. Or we'll both die."

"My boyfriend will kill you for saying this. You can go to hell."

He began yelling at her. Nothing he could say would convince Kathryn he was merely offering to save her life. She told him to stay back. And slapped him.

Crying, Rico gave up. He told her to stay awake, and she finally settled down. She's been quiet for quite a while when Rico reached over and felt her neck. She didn't slap him. She was frozen. He felt her face. Her eyes were open.

Rico sat back and listened to the wind howl through the pine trees. He decided to pull the clothes off of Kathryn's body and put them over himself. He left her in the sleeping bag. He thought maybe he should say a little prayer for the deceased. "I tried," was all he could say.

The Alpo had frozen solid so he began licking the meat in the top of the can. He was glad he was not a dog and forced to eat it all of the time. He was sure he could smell pine smoke, but figured he was slowly succumbing to hypothermia and was hallucinating. He began to dream of his parents' warm house far away in Boulder. He slipped off into a deep, peaceful sleep. Death did not bother to wake him.

The blizzard had stopped early in the morning.

(continued)

So Close But So Far Away, continued

Jack was letting his dog out to run around when he saw a large mound of snow next to a pine tree in his yard. He walked over to it, and brushed the snow off of a gray Blazer. Thirty feet from his cabin, two young kids had had to fight for survival the night before, while he slept in his warm comfortable cabin. So he said a prayer for both of them.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

QUILTING

The women sat at a kitchen table surrounded by scraps of cloth, needles, and thread. The smell of pot roast lingered somewhere in the background.

"I remember when my grandmother taught me to sew," said the oldest of the women. She was, until recently, a grandmother herself. "All of our clothes were turned into blankets, like mine. On cold nights, I could touch a patch that was a summer dress a season ago and feel warm just remembering."

"I have that quilt, Mom," said a middle-aged woman. "It's the patterned one with the flowered cotton prints."

"Yes, that's the one," the old woman agreed. "It looks like summer with all those flowers. And the middle layer is a thin wool blanket, so you're as warm as an afternoon on a porch swing."

"All this material is from clothes, isn't it?" asked a teenaged neighbor, eager to help but unaware of the circumstances.

"Yes," said the middle-aged woman. "They were Richard's clothes."

Silence simmered in the room, like the ingredients in the afternoon meat had earlier, until the girl picked up a piece of school jersey. "This was his state shirt?"

The middle-aged woman, Richard's mother, nodded.

"Can I have it? Just this piece?"

His mother nodded again.

"I miss him. It's hard to believe he's not just away at school," said the girl. "I can't believe he's not coming home..."

The grandmother kept sewing, tiny stitches of perfection. "When my grandmother taught me to sew," she said, "there were no machines. No machine that could do this kind of work. This kind of detail needs a human hand."

"This was his high school graduation gown," said the mother quietly, touching a small stack of shiny black material. "There's a piece of his prom cummerbund somewhere. We were supposed to return that, I think, but his girlfriend kept the tie. They were going to charge us anyway, he said."

The girl cried, afraid to move from her seat at the table.

"Pass me a bright colored patch," said the grandmother, threading another needle. "Something beautiful should be put in this corner."

"I'm tired of sewing," said the mother. I'm going to stop now..."

"You'll do no such thing!" snapped the woman's mother, slapping a wooden spool of thread down on the table. "Don't you want to remember? Shouldn't everyone remember?" She paused. "Now give me a bright piece of material."

The teenaged girl looked up. She saw the mother, hands twisting on the table, trying to decide what pieces of her son's past should be sewn and what pieces should be kept private. She saw the grandmother's outstretched hand.

She put the piece of the school jersey into it.

The girl then picked up a needle and threaded it as the old woman had done.

The mother ran her hands over the black material stacked in front of her. She mourned her dead son and cursed the disease that stole him from her. She mourned for all the other sons and daughters lost forever except as statistics on a government chart. She cried in silence.

Later that night, when the grandmother and the girl had almost finished, the mother threaded an embroidery needle with clean white thread and stitched her son's name into the lower left corner.

Richard's piece of the growing quilt was complete.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

SCREAM AS IF GIVING BIRTH

Scream as if giving birth
Cry as if he is lost
Sing as if you are together
But don't
Remain silent on his grave
As if he coulnt' hear.

«««««»»»»»

Bruns

VANISH

Leave me alone.
I want to sing.
I want to turn up the radio and sing.
This is my favorite song.
I wish you weren't here.
I want to sing loud.
I want to take out the cigarette lighter
and use it for a microphone.
I want to draw out the notes
until I run out of breath.
I want to sing this song.
Don't bother me for awhile.
I'm singing.

Go away.
Not forever.
Just for now.
I want to tell secrets.
I want to talk dirty
and you won't like it.
Just leave me alone for a little while.
I'm talking.

Please don't disturb me.
I'm thinking just now.
About something not very important
To you.
Very necessary unimportant thinking.
I need to be alone for awhile.
I'm thinking.

Would you please just vanish temporarily?
There is a stranger in my body demanding to exit.
He wont' come out while you are here.
He's naked.
And very self-conscious.
He needs to be alone with me.
We need to be alone.
My stranger and I want to sing.
My stranger and I have secrets to tell.
We need to talk dirty.
We're thinking.
Go away.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

I CAN PLUCK

I can pluck
Any action
Out of the air,
Tie it to a balloon string,
And give it your name.
With an ordinary
Household pin,
You can destroy it all.

«««««»»»»»

Holly Bruns

FISHING THE UNKNOWN WATER

I'm going fishing today. I'm going to attach a heavy sinker and throw the line out as far as I can and let the hook drop down, down, down, until it hits the bottom. And I'm going to wait. I'll wait as long as I can stand it. I'm fishing for understanding. I'm fishing for maturity. I'm fishing for open-eyed, small-mouthed bits of empathy. I'll jerk my hook into whatever bites and I'll keep it. I'm not throwing anything back today.

If understanding bites, I'll reel him in as carefully as I can. I really want to understand who you are. I want to understand who I am. Why do we always chafe each other until one of us bleeds? My healing abrasions don't heal so fast these days. The pleasure I once gained from scratching you eludes me now. I feel like I'm clawing my own flesh. I want to stop, but I don't know how. I need some understanding.

If maturity bites today, I'll have my smiling picture taken with this denizen of the deep blue water. No matter how big or small, I'll be proud of this catch. I've caught the devils before. Very tricky to reel in and they put up a hell of a fight! But if I can catch one of these today, it will be caught with you in mind.

If I throw my line in and catch a small-mouthed, open-eyed rainbow colored bit of empathy I might call it a day. Empathy fish thrive on understanding and maturity. If you catch empathy, you've really caught three fish in one. I'll be able to put myself in your shoes and understand how your really *did* give it your best shot. I'll know what it's like having come from where you came from and got to where you are today. I'll be mature enough to say, "Yes, you did your best and for that I thank you." God, I hope I catch an empathy.

If I don't catch anything and it gets dark and cold and I get tired and hungry and frightened, I'll zip up my parka, turn on my flashlight and settle down in my boat

(continued)

with a peanut butter sandwich. I don't know how not to be frightened. It would be much less frightening if you came fishing with me.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

I WISH I COULD SWIM

I wish I could swim
Through the weirded depths
I'm drowning in,
Of Conch Shells and Can O' Beans,
Electric eels and unplugged screams,
A Bowie Knife strapped to my scuba gear
I would cut a passage for you to hear
My splashing.

«««««»»»»»

Linda Simmons

SLUEFOOT

Although I cried
when you died
I wonder what it
must have felt like
To live in that
tired old body of yours
Marked with age
histories page
Thou slow of pace
it moved with grace

As winter neared
your time was here
Your legs couldn't hold
a body so old
So you lay down to rest
on a crisp autumn's next
Never to rise
though your body still tried
I begged you to stay
as you gave your last day
My eyes filled with tears
your memory's still here

«««««»»»»»

Judy Belfield

STANDSTILL

Traffic passes by
driving westerly into a
sunset-rouged horizon;
wind bends branches
newly greened.
I have just finished dinner
and a chapter of a book.
I am alone
watching through the window
when suddenly
a slow diffusion of melancholy
begins in my stomach deep
and spreads hotly,
radiating.
My breath stops.
An allover pain wrings me tightly.
"No," says one of my inside voices
calmly, carefully,
taking charge like an old nurse
not showing emotion.
I know this voice; it will not allow me
to implode
no matter what—
I feel safe
as though it were Mother's hand
in the darkness.
The radio, however,
conspires with God,
or Whatever—
a music exquisitely sad
trickles into the room
creeps up
suffocates me.
Then stops abruptly.
I cannot dance this number.
Not today.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

IT ALL SOUNDS

It all sounds like a bad
Country and Western song—
You took a vacation
From our love
And the airport lost your luggage.

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

THERE ONCE WAS A LIMERICK TO BE

There once was a limerick to be
I guess to be created by me.
Though I haven't a sight
Of what I will write,
I suppose I'll just wait and see...

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

IN SILENT EMPTINESS

In silent emptiness
The coffin bird
Flew;
And though you'd left me long ago,
Only now could I
Leave you.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

YOU WRITE OF

You write of
The Soviet Kamchatka Peninsula;
Mountains covered with snow,
The air like razors on your skin,
No one for thousands of miles all around.
The area is desolate,
All is quiet,
Except for the roar of an occasional jet engine.
I write of
An empty hand,
That used to hold your face,
Touch the once-warm skin,
No one but the two of us.
The area is desolate,
All is quiet,
Except for the roar of an occasional tear falling.

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

HAIKU FOR PSYCHICS

«««««»»»»»

Connie Legters

A SLEEP-TAPE

Ears listen
to rolling surf
as gentle wind swirls by,
and I am back
upon hot, white beach
of a scorching summer's day.

Sun was King,
and we, the subjects
paying homage to brilliance
with Coppertone cheeks.
We raised our faces into the burn
that we may be blessed with tan.

Ocean's rhythm
now flows in stereo
to soothe my way to sleep.
But I recall
the salty breeze
when I was young and had no fear,
and the sandy-grit of a seaside kiss.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

I TOUCH THE FRECKLE

I touch the freckle
Above my lip,
Imagining it to be
A misplaced kiss,
And not some
Cruel trick of coloring
That distracts you
From my mouth.

«««««»»»»»

Carol Spinabella

NOTORIOUS

Being the first among my friends to receive my driver's license was an exhilarating experience,. My new status allowed our group to expand our horizons of freedom and we took full advantage of this newfound liberty. I soon learned though that this privilege had a

(continued)

Notorious, continued

few disadvantages as well.

Three years ago, after having had my license for two months of carefree driving, three of my friends and I were on our way to my rich aunt's house to soak in her jacuzzi. Eagerly, we set out. Decked in jacuzzi-appropriate attire, we had one thing on our minds: relaxation.

After turning right off of Lemont ridge, I pulled onto a road and began to accelerate. The first speed sign that I noticed in the distance stated forty miles per hour. As soon as I reached forty-five miles per hour, I saw the ominous, red, flashing lights behind me, calling my name.

"What do I do?" I pleaded to my friends.

"Just pull over!" they retorted. Nervously, I did. As the officer strolled up to my window, my friends urgently advised me to generate some tears. Perhaps because I refused to stoop to such antics, I received a citation for driving forty-five miles per hour in a thirty miles per hour zone. As I sadly placed the citation in my wallet in the vacant space once occupied by my precious license, we all agreed that I obviously was the unknowing victim of a speed trap. However, I didn't know what true humiliation was until that evening.

We decided to buy Mother's Day gifts at Jewel on our way to cruise the Riverwalk, a teen hangout in Naperville. Within minutes from our final destination, the now-familiar glaring red beacon invited me to the roadside once again.

"What could I have done now?" I wailed to my astonished friends as the Naperville police officer sauntered to my window in *deja-vu*-like fashion. Click! His penlight beamed into our worried eyes and scanned the Jewel bags on the floor of the car.

I sheepishly offered my fresh, crisp citation upon his request for my driver's identification, feebly explaining that I had just received it earlier that day. After inquiring about the bags and being satisfied that the contents were not illegal contraband, he informed me that I had briefly edged over the center line on the last curve in the road. He then sent us away with a stern lecture on driving safety.

To my dismay, my friends dubbed me "Citation Queen" from that moment on. I would like to be able to say that the title proved to be a misnomer. Unfortunatley, I must admit that I have managed to uphold that infamous title over the following three years, despite my continued attempts to be the model, law-abiding driver. perhaps the time has come to swallow my pride and try the suggested tear routine. Come to think of it, tears might not be all that difficult to produce if there should be yet one more next time.

«««««»»»»

Maria Mellinger

MY DOLPHIN

My dolphin, lost to me,
In ocean of suburbs,
Flamingo conformity,
Each yard with its plastic bird;
A Japanese driftnet of security...
Once so free, her fins
Slicing the waves into
Neat little packages of water,
Deposited or exchanged for
Independence...
My dolphin, lost to me,
Would rather be human
And remove herself from our sea.

«««««»»»»

Maria Mellinger

NONSENSE FOR MR. LENNON, M.B.E.

With apologies to John of ive
And walrus of yonder tree,
In poetry I duther gallup
All alone just me.
From my books I never stray
Fro one or two or three,
For neon, glitter, armor, sword;
They're company for me.
With a Pooh Bear whence to guide us
And a honey pot sailing, we,
Over bridge, brimey, swamp, and dyke,
All alone I travel me.
Blue meanie baddies
Shout spittle spew un cree,
But protected by a Bernie,
They be safe from me.
Eight, nine, and ten,
One, two, and three,
in poetry, I duther gallup
All alone just me.
Semolina Pilchard's tower in sight
I float on yonder sea,
With nothing in the head to say
But the duther gallup in me.

«««««»»»»

Sailor

THUNDER

Days of thunder
Nights of rain
Full of wonder
Laced with pain

I said that I loved you
You turned and walked away
I reached out for you
And you just thrust me away

The clouds rolled in
The rain poured down
Was it really a sin?
Or am I just a clown?

Days of thunder
Nights of rain
Full of wonder
Laced with pain

I close my eyes
So I can be with you
Under the bluest of skies
I make love to you

I awake with a scream
Covered with sweat
Just another fading dream
I'm hoping to forget

Days of thunder
Nights of rain
Points to ponder
With nothing to gain

Days of thunder
Nights of rain
Full of wonder...

Laced with pain

«««««»»»»»

Lora Baker

A SEVEN YEAR OLD HERO

My cousin Joey turned 20 on July 10th this year. Well, he would have, but he was killed when he was 7 and I was five. He was the first friend and probably the closest I ever remember having. We had a very special bond between us. He seemed to know everything about me without even asking. He just *understood*. It was almost like we could communicate without talking.

We'd play together and talk intensively about things that are important to five and seven year olds.

"Where do lightning bugs come from, Joey?" I asked him once.

"Well, they just sort of come out of light bulbs," he told me intelligently. I though he was so smart. I really admired him.

"I drove my dad's boat yesterday," he told me.

"You drove your dad's boat? Wow!" I replied. What he didn't tell me was that it was on his father's lap with Uncle Tom helping him steer, but even if he would have told me, it wouldn't have mattered.

I had visions of him cutting through 100 foot waves in a huge pirate ship, large gray sharks biting at the boat as he sailed by. I thought he could do anything. I really loved him. I even thought I'd marry him. The last time I ever saw Joey was two or three days before he was killed. He was spending the night because his parents were going out for the night. My mom gave us baths together and we played with plastic boats and "Barbie" dolls. He splashed water into my face so I splashed back, putting a large bubble of soap in his eye. He began to cry from the sting and I began to cry because I had hurt the one person I loved—really loved—besides my parents, brother and dog. My tears made him laugh. "Why are crying, dingbat. I'm not going to die or nothing, it's just soap!"

That night I had a dream so bad and scary that I woke up crying. Joey sat next to me and held my hand. He told me whenever I have a bad dream to think of him and he'd come and chase it away. Even though he was only 2 years older, he was my hero. The next memory I have is climbing the steep narrow stairs to Aunt Sandy and Uncle Tom's apartment. I stood in the screened room on the slanted floor that made me feel dizzy while my mom and Aunt cried in each other's arms. "What's wrong?" I asked them, not really caring because all I wanted to do was go in and play with Joey. My Uncle Tom came out of the kitchen and sat me on his lap. He also had tears in his eyes.

"Honey, Joey's going to be sleeping for a long, long time."

"Well wake him up," I answered.

"We can't, sweetheart. He's never going to wake up again." My young mind couldn't comprehend this.

From what my mom told me later, Joey had been riding his "green machine," a large green big wheel with

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sticks you work back and forth to make it move, across the street. No cars had been coming, but suddenly a drunk driver whipped around the corner and killed my cousin.

My Aunt witnessed the whole scene from an upstairs window. In those few minutes, I lost the best friendship I'd ever have and she lost the only child she'd have.

The reason I wrote about this is because I had an incredibly real and scary dream. What made me think of him, I don't know, but he came sailing in on his pirate ship and chased the dream away. Then he grinned and told me, "I'll always protect you." Even now, 13 years later, he's still my hero.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

I'M OBSESSED

I'm obsessed with someone who's no longer alive—
Obsessed like a teenager who cuts men out of magazines
And surrounds herself in dreams;
Obsessed like a midlife crisis in search of
A person to attach itself to,
Obsessed like a dying being
Clutching at life
But wondering what could be happening in death's
apartment,
Where you can hear the music through the walls
But are never invited to once.
I'm obsessed
Because he never danced with me
And we both heard the needle drop.

«««««»»»»»

Barbara Pillasch

GHOSTS?

My black cat Spooky sees things I don't see
She stops midst her playing to stare, and then flee
Looks over her shoulder as if at a ghost
And I wonder to what unseen things I am host.
To take refuge under my bed is her wont
I wonder just what she sees that I don't!

«««««»»»»»

Holly Bruns

THE FINAL AUTUMN DAY

Blackest limbs on grayest blue,
A fine wet mist to mute the hue,
A chilly breeze to make them sway,
And blow the summer warmth away.

A honking "V" comes into view,
Bidding northern climes adieu.
Soggy leaves on wet ground lay,
Brilliant spectrums face away.

Old Man Winter takes his cue;
Frost will now replace the dew,
And blue transform to grayest gray,
Embrace this final autumn day.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

YOU THROW THINGS

You throw things at her,
Taunt her,
And she doesn't move.
"Just ignore them..."
Just like my mother told me...
Do you recognize yourself in this situation?
What did it feel like to be on their side?
Did your mothers give you advice, too?
"Aim high with objects,
Hit low with words..."
Or did they say
"Just ignore her. She's different."
And you thought,
No,
We have to hurt her.
Taunt her,
And see if she moves, Mom,
We *have* to.

«««««»»»»»

Shannon Greenwalt

UNTITLED

It was late as I drove home from night class; the windows were open and the radio was playing. After

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stealing a glance at the fuel gauge, I decided I'd better stop for gas.

As I pulled into the gas station, flashbacks of the film that I'd seen in psych class were running through my mind. The one point in the film that really got to me was the fact the emotionally and mentally disturbed people in this film seemed completely normal until provoked. The scary part was you could never tell what would provoke them. So with that in my mind I proceeded to pull up to the gas pump and climb from my car.

While climbing from my far, I noticed that except for myself and the attendant, an elderly man who looked as though he should have retired years ago, the place was deserted.

I proceeded to pump gas into my car, the images of the disturbed people I'd seen still running through my mind. When the amount on the pump reached my limit I replaced the nozzle onto the pump and put the cap back on my tank. As I began to walk around the back of my car, another car pulled in behind me. The car sounded as if it were on its last cylinder and the body didn't appear to be in much better shape. As I reached into my car for my purse, I decided to sneak a glance at the other driver. As I took in the other driver's appearance, an eerie feeling began creeping up my spine.

The other driver was a young man, around nineteen or twenty, and was rather large in build. He had a bandanna wrapped around his head like a bandage. He wore a flannel shirt and faded blue jeans; both looked as though they had seen better times. Even his sneakers looked as though they'd been worn since the turn of the millennium. And the look on his face seemed to say that he was just looking for trouble. By this time, that eerie feeling that had started earlier started creeping up my spine had now reached the back of my neck and was breathing heavily.

Without even really thinking, I began to roll up the windows and lock all the doors on my car before going in to pay for the gas. I quickly paid the attendant all the while visions of the next day's headline flashed through my mind: GIRL DIES AT HANDS OF TEEN PSYCHO IN DESERTED GAS STATION. I laughed to myself thinking I must be more tired than I thought. I collected my change from the attendant and started for the door. My eyes focused on nothing in particular.

As I reached to open the door it opened and to my surprise, standing on the other side and holding the door for me was the stranger. I managed to hide my surprise with a smile and muttered, "Thank you." The stranger replied with a smile and a nod of his head.

I returned to my car and the eerie feeling had gone, but it had been replaced with a feeling of foolishness. I couldn't believe that I'd let my imagination run so wild. I stole another glance at the stranger behind me, and wondered what his reaction would be if he knew what I'd been thinking. I didn't wonder long.

The stranger had caught me looking at him. With an amused smile and a wink of an eye, he was off in his car.

«««««»»»»»

Carol Spinabella

MINE

I love to look into your big amber eyes
and hold your warm body close to mine.
I love how you always listen to my problems
and comfort me when I'm feeling low or unsure of
myself.
I love to walk with you on sunny days
and lay with you on cool nights.
I love to run my fingers through your thick, black hair
and massage your neck.
I love cuddling with you
and the special way you lick my ear.
I love you because you are absolutely the greatest
dog a girl could ever have.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

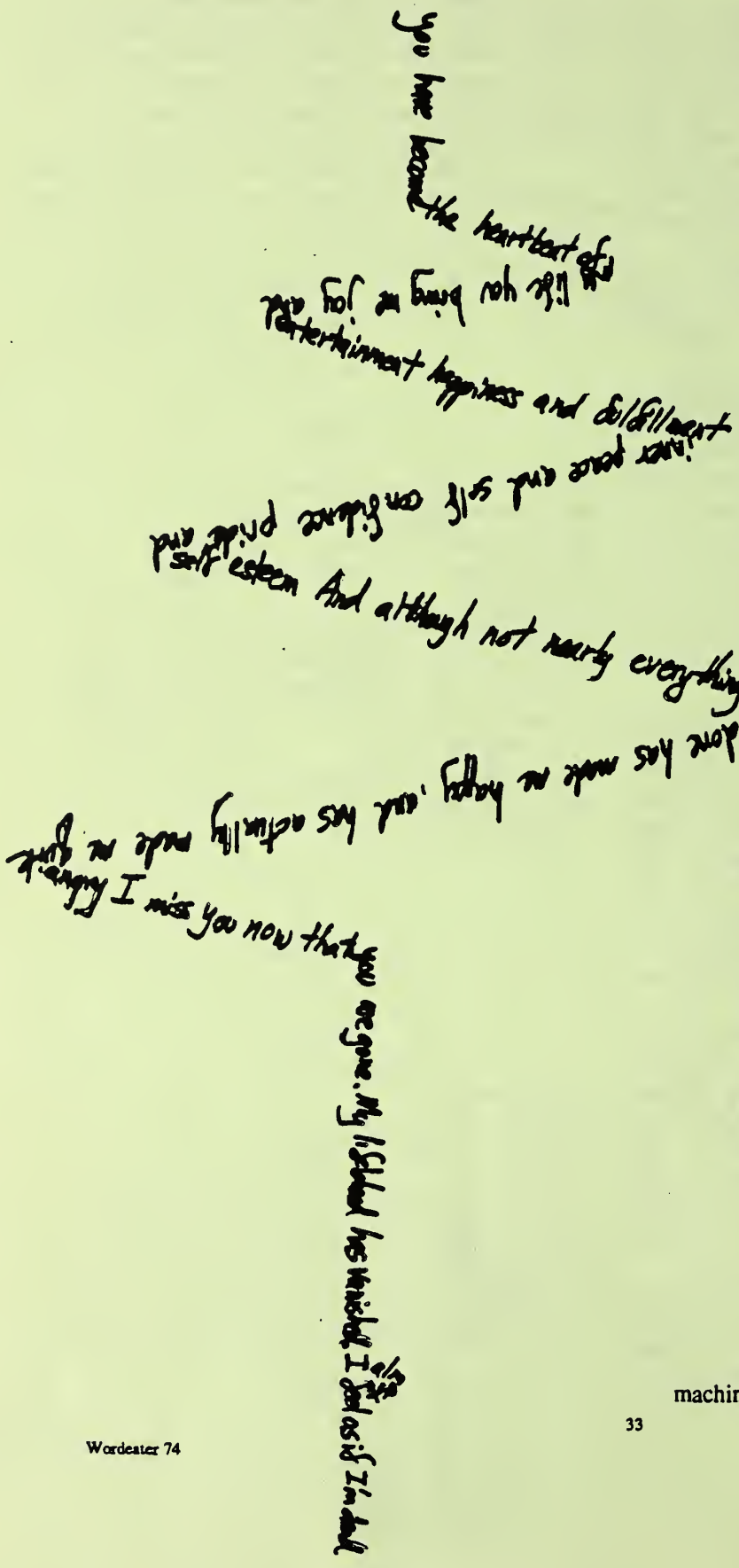
AFRAID

Afraid of what
My dreams might say
If I gave them a chance to speak,
I shivered
Under layers of insomnia
And made a song
Of the sound of
My eyelashes
Brushing the pillow case.

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

YOU HAVE BECOME THE HEARTBEAT



Maria Mellinger

IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS

In the early morning hours
The household cat is King
Of the backyard jungle,
Stalking the wet grass for field mice
Or a baby's lost toy.
I would honor this might beast,
Born of our dying environment
And living by the rules he creates,
If only I wasn't allergic.

«««««»»»»

Connie Legters

INTANGIBLE PROOF

Does he see me?
No, really, does he?
I know he looks,
but I'm not sure he sees.
I see him
for what he is,
and love him
no matter what his faults
might be.

We move
in motions,
and life perceives
us smiling, speaking,
and just being.

If I asked him,
I would know—
but I will not—
he must not see
the need for me to hear.
Time presses on,
and I wonder when he stares,
if he sees me...
really, does he?

«««««»»»»

Carol Spinabella

THE AWAKENING

My mom had left a message on my answering machine asking if I would stop over at Grandmother's

(continued)

house to look for her antique china set. She said that it was packed away somewhere in the attic. I had plans with Gary that night so I called and asked him to meet me there later.

The house was vacant now. Grandmother had died three months before and Grandpa had died shortly after her. Some people believe he died from a broken heart..and I am one of those people.

As I entered the house, warm, stagnant air replaced the once-present aromas of food simmering on the stove, fresh-cut flowers, and numerous cleaning agents...smells I grew up associating with my grandparents' house. I quickly strode to the back of the house and tugged at the resistant door at the bottom of the attic stairs until it finally yielded. As I ascended the narrow, cobwebbed stairway, the air became increasingly stuffy. Once I topped the stairs, I viewed the large attic before me. I could barely breathe the suffocating air.

Immediately, I headed for a stack of boxes that appeared newer than the rest of the old items stored in the attic. On top of the box marked, "China Set," was a box labeled "Wedding Gown." Out of curiosity, I opened that one first. I pulled out the carefully-folded off-white dress. It was very lacy, yet simple. "How beautiful!" I gasped. I held the dress up to me and stood in front of the full-length mirror, which was just a few steps away. The mirror had a thick coat of dust all over it. I tried to rush enough away with my hand to see myself. "Will I ever get married?" I asked my reflection. "I wish I knew if Gary really loved me. He does many things for me, like fix my car, cook for me, run errands for me, but...no dozens of roses, no candle-lit dinners. I've been with him for over a year now and...God, this dress is pretty! I wonder how Grandmother knew that Grandpa loved her." When I had asked her once, she had said, "I can't explain it. I just knew."

As I again reflected upon her obscure answer, I touched the mirror with my fingertips and suddenly found myself falling limply to the floor. My head was spinning and my vision was blurry. I looked up at the mirror to see a dark figure walking slowly toward me from within, extending its hand. Then everything went black. Silence engulfed me. Finally, I heard a young man's voice echoing in the distance, "Claudia, time to get up. I made your breakfast." I opened my eyes to find myself lying in a bed with white morning light streaming through the lace curtains. The young man approached the side of the bed. It was my grandpa! He couldn't have been more than twenty-five years old! "Why did he call me Claudia, my grandmother's name?" But before I could even start to ponder this mystery, my head began to spin and I was again in blackness.

My grandpa's voice again penetrated the silence. "See, I didn't forget that our anniversary is today." I opened my eyes to see my grandpa awkwardly extending his arm toward me, a small red velvet box in his hand. "Here. Happy 20th Anniversary, Claudia," he addressed me. I accepted the tiny box and opened it. Inside was a beautiful heart-shaped pendant hanging from an extremely thin chain. "It opens," he meekly offered. Inside the pendant were two miniature pictures—one of my grandmother and one of himself. They were both in their wedding attire. "I hope you like it," he hesitantly added as he fastened the tiny clasp behind my neck. As I noticed a self-conscious flush beginning to spread across his face, I was transported again into darkness.

Once again, Grandpa's voice greeted me. "The car's all warmed up now. Are you ready for church? Don't forget your scarf. There's a nippy wind outside." I opened my eyes to Grandpa, now considerably aged. He shuffled ahead to open the door for me. His gait was slow, but steady. As he held the door for me, I noticed that the wrinkles in his face were beginning to deepen. his image then faded slowly into blackness.

Beep...Beep...Beep...Soon I could see that the high-pitched beeping sound was coming from a heart monitor in a hospital room. I was lying in the bed and Grandpa was sitting close beside me on a chair. Silently, he held my hand. His back was now slightly stooped. His grasp grew firmer as the perspiration accumulated on his face. He gently patted my forehead with a damp towel as tears welled up in his eyes. His lips trembled, but he didn't speak.

Suddenly, a loud, buzzing ring startled me. My eyes shot open. My mind began to register the familiar surroundings of Grandmother's attic. I realized that I was still clutching Grandmother's wedding dress. Then that same buzzing ring startled me again. It was the doorbell, I realized. I remembered about Gary.

I raced down the attic stairs, swung open the front door, and there was Gary, greeting me with a big smile. "Where's that china box? I'll carry it out for you," he offered. "Wow, that's pretty. I never saw you wear that before," Gary exclaimed.

"This old shirt?" I began.

"No, that necklace," he replied.

My hand reached up to my neck to discover the heart-shaped pendant. Without answering him, I enthusiastically threw my arms around him.

I'm sure that he wondered what had gotten into me. Some things just can't be explained.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

THEODORA

For a minute
I'm back in 1975, maybe,
When my teddy bear
Was new and alive,
The most prized possession
Next to my "Sock it to Me" shirt
And a real plastic stove
That could melt M & M's
With its lightbulb range.

Grandma said teddy should
Wear overalls,
Like real bears do,
But Teddy's a girl
And I can't wait for weekly trips
To Circus World toy stores
For new dresses
And booties
To present to her.

At this age
It's okay
To love your bear more than
Mom and Dad;
To hold her through the night
And still hit little brother on
The top of the head
With her sizable body.

I can take her with me
Wherever the world tells me
I must go;
Mom snaps her into my seat belt
With an annoyed click.
"Security blanket,"
she thinks.
"She'll outgrow it."

For a minute
I'm in that world.
Then the alarm goes off
And Teddy rolls out of my arms
Onto the floor.
I have to step over her
And get dressed
Like an adult.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

I MET THIS BOY

I met this boy
In my poems last night,
Never learned his name,
But I loved him all the same.
We could talk about anything.
We could do anything.
I think we *did* do "anything."
I wanted to stay with him,
But I'm not in anybody's poems,
And so I came back into the world,
Off my pages,
And remained alone.

«««««»»»»»

Barbara Pillasch

HAIKU

October preens and
pirouettes in her golden
gown of autumn fire

October's falling
at my feet—stricken down by
autumn's golden want

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

SIXTEEN CANDLES + FOUR

Sixteen candles + four
Were on my last birthday cake,
And still
I find myself
Nervous,
Giggly,
And in great pain
Each time you glance at me.
I don't think I ever
Want to grow up.

«««««»»»»»

nnie Legters

A BLUE-SILK GRAVE

I watched his hair—
each strand a silken thread—
fall as in slow motion
over a furrowed brow.
His displeasure
made me squirm,
considering rash reason
of his concern.

I never thought to lose
the bonding band of gold
that sunk downward
through the chlorine pool.
Smarting eyes did burn
into silver-shine,
but failed to retrieve the prize.

We faced the chasm
of silence
molded to the scene,
faces turned away,
feelings raw as a silk screen.
Then he laughed,
a masculine, uncaring splash,
and said it was just a ring.

He bought one new
without vows,
and placed it upon a finger
of the one he loves.
We smiled at ease
of the problem solved.
But-ah, that worn ring
did so quickly fall...

Sometimes,
I wonder about promises
exchanged,
and if chlorine might ruin
finish of the golden shine
sunk in blue-silk waters,
there entombed
with time.

«««««»»»»»

Barbara Pillasch

STAND-IN

As I went down this morning to feed them, I could still hear old Les saying, "You still feedin' them ducks for me?" That was the last thing he ever said to me. He'd raised his head, which had been slumped on his shoulder, and opened one eye.

He was crumpled in his favorite chair, which was big and battered and lumpy—and probably as old as he was. It sat by the window overlooking his beloved Kankakee River. From there he could see "his" ducks and other creatures that wandered along the bank and fed on the cracked corn he used to throw out for them each morning.

He'd been in that chair since he'd come home from the hospital. He was shriveled and shrunken, arms and legs akimbo as though someone had carelessly tossed him there. Yet he was alert as a bird sometimes, and stubborn as my dog, Annie. Wouldn't let anyone put him t bed. Yelled and cussed when they tried. "Let me be!" he'd yell. They let him be.

The shades were drawn, that last time I visited old Les. The hot afternoon sun oozed around the edges and crept lazily along the floor and part way up his bare leg where his p.j.'s had hitched up. The skin there was a bilious yellow and the flesh on the hand I had felt like a dried-up mushroom. Behind one of the shades, the frustrated buzz of a trapped fly seemed magnified in the somnolent air, which was thick as old grease and smelled of Lysol and waiting.

Bun said, "He won't eat. Hasn't eaten for days." I looked at old Les, listening to us behind his closed eyes and thought, *You old fox*. He was still running the show. That was when he raised his head, opened one eye and said, "You still feedin' them ducks for me?"

That was day before yesterday. He died yesterday in the early a.m.in his battered old chair by the window—overlooking the Kankakee River. "Died in his sleep," Bun said. He was eighty-six.

As I fed the ducks, I noticed the corn-cob impaled on its spike in the oak tree—a treat for the squirrels that old Les had faithfully replaced with a fresh ear of corn every day of the world since who knows how long before I moved here. Today I replaced it.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

FOR JERRY, ANDY, AND ME

Happy hour.
What an ironic name for the time slot
In which thousands of unsuspecting
Brain cells are slaughtered daily.
It's like hunting, I guess;
Shotgun, shotglass—
What's the difference?
Little neuron foxes falling prey
To one-hundred-proof hounds and
The hangover in trophy,
Mounted fuzzy-faced in tomorrow morning's mirror.
Have a happy hour, brother,
You won't remember the night.
I'm on my way to alcoholism and
It's all so Hemingwayesque.

«««««»»»»»

Barbara Pillasch

A CONVENING

There is a riot outside my window. I glance out in time to see a noisy cloud settle like a dark shroud upon a nearby tree. The riot continues as large chunky neckless bodies perch and preen, their ebony-hued feathers flashing in brilliant shards of blue and green iridescence in the sunlight. Perhaps a hundred crows sling to the branches with scaly claws—a chorus of black-clad biddies. They argue, visit, gossip, their glittering diamond eyes darting—furtive and sly, bold and curious. As they caw excitedly, an occasional gleeful cackle rises above the cacophony as though in response to some hilarious joke. On and on they socialize, small-brained and dumb, with no thought of tomorrow or memory of yesterday. No plan, no worries.

As I peer from the window I have caught the attention of one of these enormous birds, who stares at me with beady unblinking eye, and we contemplate one another for a moment. Soon, he loses interest and looks away. Suddenly, in total, inexplicable agreement, the hyper, undulating crowd rises as one, again a dusky airborne riot, moving off (with eyes peeled along the way, no doubt, for a tasty morsel of carrion as refreshment) to engulf another distant tree and continue the party.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

I WOULD TALK TO YOU

I would talk to you
But your silence intimidates me.
It wraps you in the cure-all to conversation,
Protects you from people the rest of us run from,
Hides you deep inside your own mystery.
It makes me envy you,
Because I feel the need to talk
To prove I exist.
The things I do aren't real
Unless everyone hears about them.
Privacy is a room I'm afraid to lock myself into;
I talk circles in an auditorium instead.
I would talk to you,
But I wait for you to come to me,
To show me the way to silence,
To hold my hand through the quiet paths,
And to kiss me like a cat waking its master
With one flick of the tongue in the absence of sound.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

I CAN REMEMBER

I can remember when images of
My own death collected about me
Like flies. Now someone else had died,
And his images are buzzing
Throughout funeral homes and fantasies,
Landing on every surface I turn to,
Leaving dirty little tracks
So much harder to clean up
Than suicidal one shots.

**

I NEED TO SEE YOU AGAIN

I need to see you gain because I
Can't understand these sudden bursts
Of love
In phone calls, letters, and photos.
I need 24 hours of
Subtlety.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

LEAD YOURSELF

Lead yourself
Out of your knowledge
And accept my ideas,
Accept me,
Into your arms.

**

EVEN THE QUIETEST

Even the Quietest
Animal in the Forest
Has a voice
With which to whisper

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

ECHO CANYON HAIKU

Hellohello...is...
is...therethere...anyoneone...
outout...theretherethere...

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

BECAUSE I'M IN THE HABIT

Because I'm in the habit
Of studying my shoes
And avoiding eyes,
I have noticed you
Sitting next to me
(Or rather, noticed your feet).
I can almost glance all the way
Up to your knee,
But all else is taboo.
I keep hoping you'll bend
To tie your shoe
And I'll get a look at your eyes
To see if you notice me, too.

«««««»»»»»

Barbara Pillasch

THE RAIN FELL INCESSANTLY

The man stared at the sight before him
As though awaking from a dream
Saw sundry souls with eyes gone dim
And heard a hungry baby scream.

And heard a hungry baby scream
Wet and ragged in the cold
Souls caught in the streetlight's beam
Begging boldly, young and old.

Begging boldly, young and old
Mercilessly begging aid
Wet and ragged in the cold
The man looked down and was afraid.

The man looked down and was afraid
Loathe to hear the baby scream
And beggars begging for aid:
Refused to waken from his dream.

Refused to waken from his dream
He could not see, he would not see
He dared not hear the baby scream
The rain—it fell incessantly.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

I TRANSFORM MYSELF

I transform myself
Into an elegant young woman
Entering the circus freak show
Because, at least,
People don't pay
To see my imperfections.

«««««»»»»»

Jeff DeGrave

THE JAPS

The Japs couldn't have
developed haikus! They all
write vertically.

«««««»»»»»

FRANCES ALWAYS ENJOYS A HAPPY ENDING.